★★ ALL-STAR ★ OLD-TIMERS' ★ ISSUE ★★

15¢

Adventure

FEB.

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS ★★ W. C. TUTTLE
ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON ★★ CHARLES
TENNEY JACKSON ★ SIDNEY HERSCHELL
SMALL ★★ FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
GEORGES SURDEZ ★★ F. R. BUCKLEY ★
ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN ★★ *AND OTHERS*

PRAISE THE LORD

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON
Founder "Psychiana"
Moscow, Idaho

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. For I discovered that when a man finds the dynamic, invisible Power which is God, that man possesses a priceless heritage. Failure, fear, confusion go out of the life, and in the place of these things, there comes a sweet assurance that the Power which created the universe is at the disposal of all. And life takes on a brighter hue when the fact is fully known that at any hour of the day or night the amazing Power of Almighty God can be thrown against any and all undesirable circumstances—and they disappear.

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If you will send me your name and address now, I'll send you two FREE booklets which tell you what happened to me when I talked with God. You will learn from these two booklets where I talked with God, and what I said to God. As I say, these booklets are quite free and there is no obligation whatsoever incurred by sending for them.

BUT SEND NOW—while you are thinking about it. The address is "PSYCHIANA," Inc., Dept. 121, Moscow, Idaho. This may easily be the turning-point in your whole life. Here is the address again: "PSYCHIANA," Inc., Dept. 121, Moscow, Idaho. The prophecy mentioned below is also FREE.

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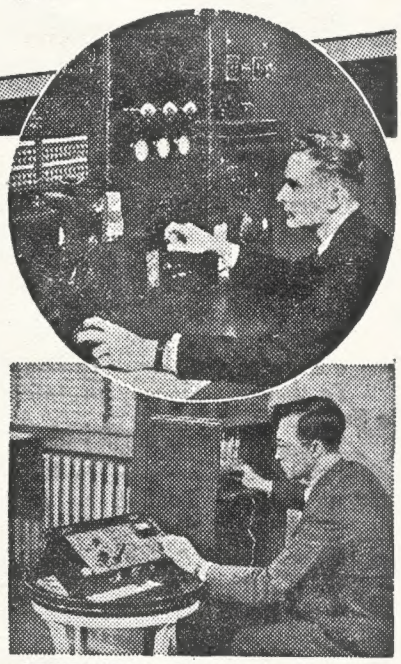
to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN



I Trained These Men

$200 a Month in Own Business

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field." ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

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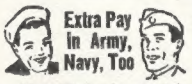

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the coupon now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, MUCH HIGHER PAY. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Hundreds of service men now enrolled.

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My "50-50 Method" Helps Many Make $5,$10 a Week Extra While Learning

Many N. R. I. Students make $5, $10 a week extra money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. I send EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that tell how to do it!

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MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how *you* can train at home. If you want to *jump your pay*—Mail Coupon AT ONCE. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3BS9, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 3BS9
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MARCH ISSUE ON SALE FEBRUARY 10TH

Vol. 108, No. 4 for February, 1943 Best of New Stories

Ballad of a Beachcomber (verse) . . . . . GOUVERNEUR MORRIS 12
From Tahiti to Moorea plies the *Poti Mitiaru. Tea nua nua* rainbow's end.

Tokyo Drums . . . . . SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL 14
Meet Llewelyn Davies, the only American free to walk the streets of Nippon the night those Shangri-la-based bombers roared overhead.

Down to Brass Tacks . . . . . ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON 26
"They'll leave yuh grounded on the shoals of grief," Skipper Pring told Smeed, gazing at the trader's gallery of cardboard courtesans. And damned if they didn't up and pin a murder rap on him just a week later.

Star-Gazer . . . . . FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE 37
Allowance must be made for human error but the stars are never wrong.

It's a Tough Life . . . . . W. C. TUTTLE 40
Before Brazos Butler came to Peaceful Valley that Arizony town was just what its name implied. After—well, that was a cayuse of another color.

Tanker Crew (verse) . . . . . ROBERT D. ABRAHAMS 51
We tanker men, we don't complain, we're ready to sail tonight,
To show 'em the way an American gang puts up an American fight.

No Surrender . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 52
Mohammed ben Rekabi had fought through many wars but this one he could not understand. Nothing about it seemed to make sense!

Raid on Jigger's Reef . . . . . ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 56
In which the schooner *Annabelle* met, and you might say immobilized, the *Matsui Maru*, with a quart of lush berries and several bottles of gin.

A Gun for France . . . . . CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON 66
There she lay, pretty as a picture, sixty-five feet of white paint, teak deck and brasswork, unscarred and on an even keel. The only catch was the seven fathoms of blue Caribbean water above her that had to be removed before the gun in her hold could shoot.

Of Sorcery and Swordplay (a novelette) . . . . . F. R. BUCKLEY 78
The world is as full of curses as a dark evening is of bats, but only guilt gives them a branch to perch on.

Shanghai Post-Mortem (1st part of 2) . . . . . ERNEST O. HAUSER 102
To Robert Dumont, the "City on the Mud Flats" by the Whangpoo was the hangover of a jaundiced continent. For this was '41, with the great *hongs* collapsing one by one as the Japs took over from the *taipans*.

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
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Lost Trails . . . . . Where old paths cross 129

Cover painted for Adventure by John Drew *Kenneth S. White, Editor*

Published once a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 2, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription $1.50 in advance. Single copy, 15 cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Subscription Dept., 205 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y.
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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

IN LAST month's *Trail Ahead* we said new blood ought to be given a chance to mix itself with the printer's ink, even in an "Old-Timers'" issue. Ernest O. Hauser, whose two-part tale of the China Coast begins on page 102 this month, appears on our contents page for the first time to join the ranks of familiar faces at our fire. We're glad to welcome him and listen to him introduce himself and his story. He says—

> The setting of "Shanghai Post-Mortem" is, of course, distinctly pre-Pearl Harbor. This is the Shanghai of old, the Shanghai of the International Settlement, the gayest, strangest, richest city of Asia, a free republic where the lion lay down with the lamb. True, at the time the imaginary action takes place, the little brown sons of the Rising Sun had come precariously near to "taking over." But the white man still ruled the town. I was fond of Shanghai, where I served as a correspondent for several years, and I like to remember her the way she was. Ever since I was twenty, I've spent much of my time "somewhere east of Suez," doing free-lance work and seeing as much of India, China, South-East Asia and Japan as I could. Back in New York, I worked on the staff of the Institute of Pacific Relations, wrote a report for the Foreign Policy Association, and published a couple of books—"Shanghai: City for Sale" and, in 1941, "Honorable Enemy." My last visit to the Orient was in 1939, and I've spent the last few years writing articles for the magazines, *SEP, Life, Reader's Digest, Atlantic Monthly, Asia, etc.* But all that, of course, was strictly non-fiction. Here is the first thing that is different—between ourselves, I had more fun writing it.

Mr. Hauser, one of the recognized authorities on the Far East, is now in Chungking with commissions from various magazines, including *Adventure,* to write articles on the war in China. For more than two months, up until the time he left, he lived out of a suitcase literally not knowing from one day to the next when a place in a plane would be available for him. On several occasions he was informed that he could fly the next day, only to have his seat pre-empted by someone with a military priority. But now he's on the scene of action and we hope to hear from him any month now.

ROBERT D. ABRAHAMS, whose stirring tribute to the tanker men appears on page 51, is a lawyer when not

(Continued on page 8)

15 Minutes a Day!

Give me just this and I'll prove I can make you

A NEW MAN!

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. *Right now* I'm even training hundreds of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

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All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, 97-lb. weakling. And NOW it knows I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in such quick time? The answer is *"Dynamic Tension"!*

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *"Dynamic Tension"* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you *inside*, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

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THAT is the name immediately thought of by men who WANT to attain a physique that will withstand hardship and strain, ready for any possible emergency, personal or national.

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Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."* It tells you exactly what *"Dynamic Tension"* can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. RESULTS it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 832, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

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(Continued from page 6)

writing poetry. Or should it be the other way around? His verse has been published in many magazines, though "Tanker Crew" marks his first appearance in *Adventure*.

F. R. BUCKLEY was over-succinct, we think, when he described his current novelette as "1 moral principle, 1 siege, 1 commando-raid (model of 1530), 2 duels and 1 full-scale battle." We demanded some further notations for this department and the author obliged thuswise—

With regard to that terror of a curse which motivates "Of Sorcery and Sword-play," I should like to say that I've understated, rather than exaggerated, the state of mind prevalent in the Age of Despots. Benvenuto Cellini, writing in the late XVI century, tells of personal participation in magic which raised menacing multitudes; and Symonds, historian of the Cinquecento, lists belief in the supernatural as one of the most powerful influences on the behavior of tyrants. Of one (he happened to be a Moor) it is related that a soothsayer's prediction of murder by "a small assassin" caused him to put to death all boys and short men about his court; after which he went to Sicily and fulfilled the prophecy by dying of amoebic dysentery.

Ezzelino da Romano, perhaps the most ferocious of the Italian tyrants, was so terrified of the curses that had been heaped on him, that he never left his castle; never spent two nights in the same room; and when it thundered, fled to a hole in the solid rock, and there crouched whimpering.

William Seabrook, in his book on modern witchcraft, seems to take the view that the dynamic force behind a curse is *the victim's opinion of his own actions;* all the witch or wizard does is to implement, or rather canalise, this force. Sticking pins into wax dolls, or melting them at the fire, will not hurt the addressee unless (a) he knows it is being done and (b) agrees in his heart that he deserves punishment. A higher degree of guilt, in a neurotic temperament (and there never was a tyrant, from Lycurgus to Hitler, who was not violently neurotic) could easily lead to the imagination of a formal curse, where none in fact existed. For proof of this, one has only to read Cotton Mather's "Wonders of the Invisible World"—which refers not to sixteenth-century Italy, but to eighteenth-century New England. It can't be five years, moreover, since a man was tried in Pennsylvania for the murder of a "wizard" who, he believed, had "hexed" him.

The obvious question arises: why Hitler, notoriously superstitious and certainly cursed, seems to show no ill effects? The answer (I am assured by reliable warlocks) is that material success armors the subject, as it were. But when a set-back cracks this armor; or when, considering his success complete, the subject lays aside his mental chain-mail—

The Bible seems to sum it all up, as usual: "The wicked flourish as a green bay tree; but their end is seen."

APPARENTLY Georges Surdez has really been fretting about those remarks re coincidence which appeared here in *Camp-Fire* to accompany his "Mission to Mauritania" in the November issue. At any rate, now comes the following communiqué to bolster further his position—

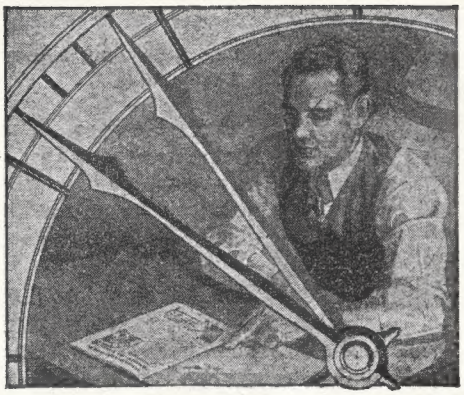
That long rubber arm of coincidence we were mentioning before, about the meeting of Nick with an ex-Foreign Legionnaire in my yarn "Mission to Mauritania," is stretching again—and without my having to actuate it.

I recently received a postal card from which I quote: "I read your latest stories while I was in India. How is my old Legionnaire pal getting along? I am convalescing fine now. Been torpedoed, rescued and torpedoed the second time, bombed in Calcutta, was in Madagascar when it was invaded. I spent 43 days in a lifeboat and am now in the Staten Island Marine Hospital. I have a broken hip and shrapnel in my leg. I am feeling fine and hope this card finds you the same."

It was signed by an old friend of mine, Albert L. . . ., whom I met first in the Foreign Legion, Mounted Company of Colomb-Bechar, Saharan Territories.

I went to see him at the hospital and as I expected found him a cheerful patient. Sucking on a very large cigar, he told me of his operations. His real trouble, he thought, came from nerves at being laid up when there was so much going on. He did look sort of pale, but he reassured me very soon as to the reason: That lifeboat in which he had drifted forty-three

(Continued on page 10)



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They are the hours of your leisure time—usually spent in recreation or odds and ends.

These can be your growth hours, the time when through training you can prepare for more efficient service on the job or for the job ahead. During your working hours, you are usually buried in routine details, growing slowly if at all. But in these spare hours, your mind can reach out to absorb the experience of others, to learn the principles and methods behind your job and behind your field. The next day on the job, you will find yourself using something of what you learned the night before to the benefit of your job and the pleasure of your boss.

Interestingly enough, this spare time study can be fascinating recreation, not drudgery. And the few minutes spent this way tone up the remaining hours of your leisure —make them more interesting.

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(Continued from page 8)

days had floated right through the equatorial zone, and the hot sun, the drenchings with salt water when the weather grew rough, had peeled off a lot of skin that was coming in light. That must have been a trip, and although he talks of it simply, he must have been in charge from some details he narrated. At least toward the end—twenty guys or so died of assorted miseries, three committed suicide, so there must have been room for promotion. And all the time, as Albert had carelessly permitted himself to be caught between the torpedoed ship's side and the lifeboat, he had a pain in his hip —which turned out to be broken.

All that came in snatches, because we talked Legion a lot, brought up this and that, who had slit Sergeant Von Schnaps' throat from ear to ear that night in Colomb-Bechar; of the Russian sergeant who couldn't play poker; of the Greek sergeant who played poker too well; of *Adjudant-Chef* H. who was a captain in Norway and no doubt has his battalion in Libya if alive; of Sergeant V. who now commands a squadron of Circassian cavalry in the Near East; of Gerard Hamilton, the only American to hold a commission in the pre-war (none other quite as good, you know) Legion, whom we both know and who was in the papers that day as having surrendered casually to the American landing force at Arzew: "They told me the Americans were here. I put on my uniform and reported. I'm glad I was not on active duty."

But here comes the coincidence: Albert was torpedoed this last time off Bathurst, in British Gambia. He'd been in that port, in Freetown also. He had not read "Mission to Mauritania." And he told me that there were many Axis submarines off West Africa, which was not hard to imagine; that there were rumors of supply-ships meeting them, which is a normal development; but, he added, there were German planes seen on occasion, supposed to be coming from a secret base somewhere in North Senegal! That was precisely the theme of the story—yet not a line had appeared in print.

Now, suppose I had had my central character, Nick, dropped into the sea, picked up by a drifting lifeboat to find that craft in charge of an ex-Legionnaire like Albert? Albert would know any European or American who had been in the Occidental Desert over a given period of years. That would be much more fantastic than the meeting of an ex-Legionnaire at the spot to which he had been sent because he was an ex-Legionnaire.

O.K. Georges. You've convinced us that damn near anything can happen in this cockeyed world these days—and usually does! Coincidence is our favorite dish from now on. But don't stretch it too fine.

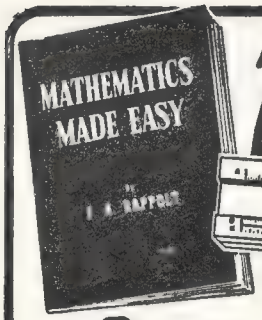
THAT complete file of our magazine—Vol. 1, No. 1 through Vol. 106, No. 6 inclusive—which we mentioned as being available in the December issue to some organization or club with library facilities found a home in short order. The magazine had been published less than twenty-four hours when a telegram arrived from the librarian of the University of Texas requesting that we put him in touch with the owner. We did so immediately and are happy to report that the file is now on its way to shelf-room in Austin. The T. U. request was the first of several and we are sorry the others couldn't be filled but we're keeping them on file and should we hear of any similar offer in the future we'll put the interested parties in touch with each other.

Anthony M. Rud, who edited *Adventure* from October 1927 to February 1930; died suddenly in the first week of December. The sad news reached us just as this issue goes to press.

FOR the benefit of anyone who may have been skipping *Camp-Fire* lately, or who missed the *Trail Ahead* last month and may be wondering how come this "Old-Timers' Issue" and what it's all about, here's the why and wherefore.

Some months ago the suggestion was made by several long-time readers of our magazine that it might be fun to have an issue devoted to stories by authors who were familiar names on our contents page in years past, but who had been too long absent. We thought the idea had a heap of merit and began casting around to see what writers, still going strong, might, for one reason or another, have been allowed to play truant thuswise.

(Continued on page 127)



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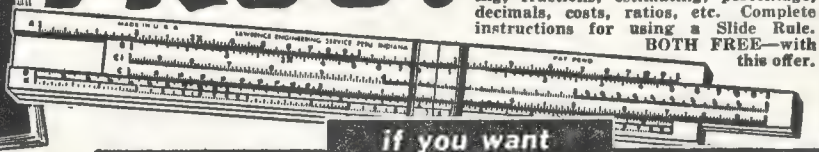

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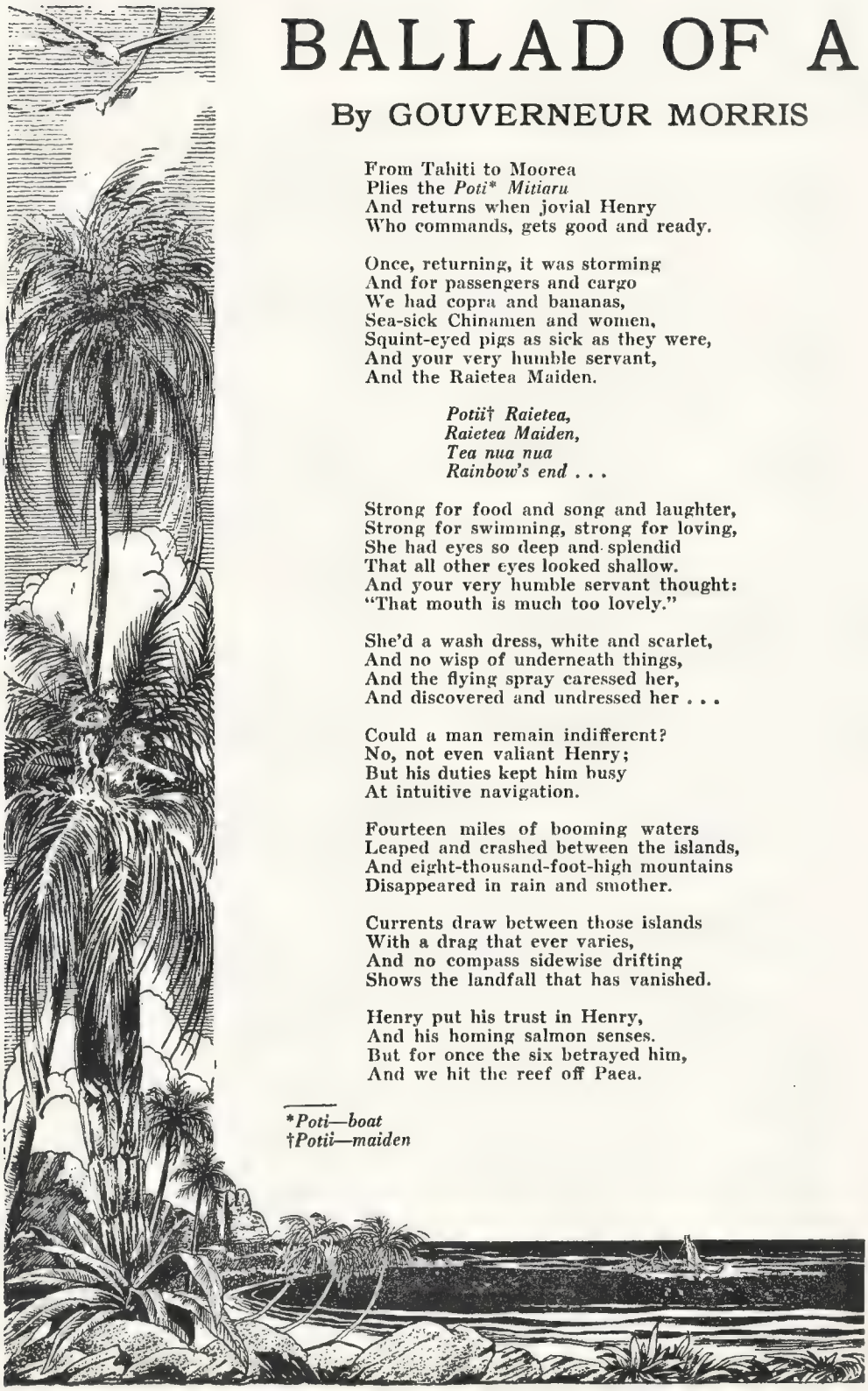


BALLAD OF A

By GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

From Tahiti to Moorea
Plies the *Poti* Mitiaru*
And returns when jovial Henry
Who commands, gets good and ready.

Once, returning, it was storming
And for passengers and cargo
We had copra and bananas,
Sea-sick Chinamen and women,
Squint-eyed pigs as sick as they were,
And your very humble servant,
And the Raietea Maiden.

Potii† Raietea,
Raietea Maiden,
Tea nua nua
Rainbow's end . . .

Strong for food and song and laughter,
Strong for swimming, strong for loving,
She had eyes so deep and splendid
That all other eyes looked shallow.
And your very humble servant thought:
"That mouth is much too lovely."

She'd a wash dress, white and scarlet,
And no wisp of underneath things,
And the flying spray caressed her,
And discovered and undressed her . . .

Could a man remain indifferent?
No, not even valiant Henry;
But his duties kept him busy
At intuitive navigation.

Fourteen miles of booming waters
Leaped and crashed between the islands,
And eight-thousand-foot-high mountains
Disappeared in rain and smother.

Currents draw between those islands
With a drag that ever varies,
And no compass sidewise drifting
Shows the landfall that has vanished.

Henry put his trust in Henry,
And his homing salmon senses.
But for once the six betrayed him,
And we hit the reef off Paea.

**Poti—boat*
†Potii—maiden

BEACHCOMBER

DECORATION BY L. STERNE STEVENS

Yes, we hit that reef one wallop,
And green combers trampled on us
Like wild horses at the gallop.

Then our Henry, dark and whale-like
Flashed two rows of teeth like tombstones,
And in current Bêche de Mer cried:
"*Weetie, savie vous qui pouvie.*"

So each savied as each pouvied,
Like some trick shot in a movie.

Up and up I went and over
Till upon the reef I thudded . . .
There beside me laughing loudly
Stood the Raietea Maiden.
Grabbed a hand and dragged me, running,
To escape the wave that followed,
Which caught up, but spent and shattered.
We were safe and sound, though battered.
"God," she said, "but was that funny!"

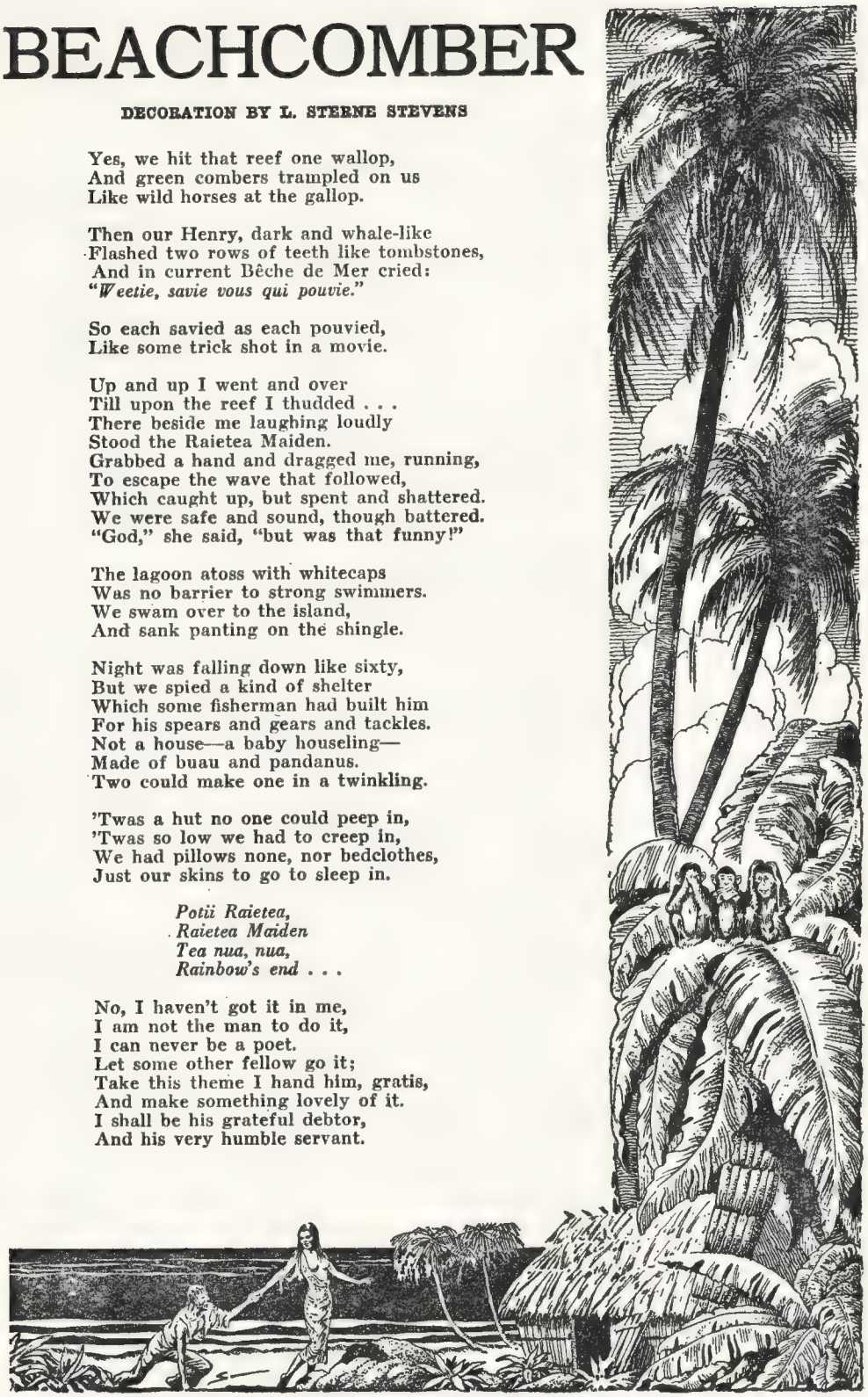
The lagoon atoss with whitecaps
Was no barrier to strong swimmers.
We swam over to the island,
And sank panting on the shingle.

Night was falling down like sixty,
But we spied a kind of shelter
Which some fisherman had built him
For his spears and gears and tackles.
Not a house—a baby houseling—
Made of buau and pandanus.
Two could make one in a twinkling.

'Twas a hut no one could peep in,
'Twas so low we had to creep in,
We had pillows none, nor bedclothes,
Just our skins to go to sleep in.

Potii Raietea,
Raietea Maiden
Tea nua, nua,
Rainbow's end . . .

No, I haven't got it in me,
I am not the man to do it,
I can never be a poet.
Let some other fellow go it;
Take this theme I hand him, gratis,
And make something lovely of it.
I shall be his grateful debtor,
And his very humble servant.



TOKYO DRUMS

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HAMILTON GREENE

Soldiers with bayonets, themselves as berserk as the others, hacked and jabbed to end the panic. Tokyo had been stripped naked.

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

IT WAS so hot that the salmon-skin raincoats crackled on their pegs in the hut where the bearded Ainu elders were meeting, although the sound could have come from the clouds of flies buzzing in the smoke-blackened rafters. Outside, in the wilderness clearing, the sacred bear cub whimpered in his cage, and shaggy little unshod horses moved restlessly when the forest monkeys screamed.

The *saramba* on the mountain where the Ainu had been driven was so isolated, so deep in Japan's north island, and so poor, that no Japanese came to it, not

even to sell the *sake* which the villagers were forbidden to simulate with millet and birchroot fermented together. Years ago, the Ainu who had once populated Japan violated this decree; and what had happened was still remembered. Now, when wine was needed, to moisten the posts of peeled wood down which gods slid to earth, or to celebrate a wedding, or merely to bring forgetfulness, *sake* had to be traded for at a distant seacoast town and then carried back through the jungle.

For once there was no discussion as to who should go for it. As the chief said, the gods had smiled in sending them an Ainu from another *saramba* who, although as similar to themselves as sand to sand, did not enjoy *sake*. Such a man would never remove corks, nor, after drinking, add water to the bottles.

The man at whom all looked was the youngest. Like the others, he was heavily bearded, dark, and stocky. His eyes, like the elders', were not slanted. He wore a coat of tree-fiber such as the women wove on their ankle-looms; it was stained blue and belted with a narrow skin girdle through which a bear-killing knife was thrust. His legs were bare. Moccasins covered his feet.

The younger man stooped and shouldered a filled netting sack, and the chief adjusted the forehead strap. In the sack were carved wooden knife-sheaths, many mats, bark-cloth, wolf pelts and pots of wolf's-bane roots pounded with red earth and mixed with fat which, on arrowheads, had killed the wolves; bear meat was for food. The chief patted the man sadly. Trading with Japanese was unpleasant.

Women, weaving where shade eased the savage sun, watched when the burdened man left the hut and crossed the clearing. Matrons called, "*Cuspo*, Koropok," in good-bye. A maid ran after him, her buff-and-scarlet robe flashing away from brown legs, and, because he had no wife, tied her eating bowl to his sack. Laughter was in the man's ears as he entered the black jungle.

Naked hunters, in the gloom, hid until the man was recognized as Koropok; even here the Ainu were afraid. This was the last refuge of men whom the Japanese called *keto-jin*—hairy ones. Those Ainu who had not fled to fastnesses barricaded by peaks and rent with gorges had been forced to become *eta*, the pariahs who slaughtered animals, collected swill, buried bodies at execution grounds.

The sweetness of giant magnolias tangled the man's senses just as trailing vines entangled his sack and shoulders, knife and legs. Bent low, he climbed higher and higher along the dim way, never pausing until he reached a ravine down which water zigzagged. Here he slipped off the pack, drank sparingly, and then stared at the pool formed by red rocks. It was several minutes before he went on.

Only when he reached the ridge, where trees swarmed clear to the backbone, did he stop again. A hint of coolness, from the northeast, could not dry his sweat, but he took a deep breath of the less stagnant air. He did not remove his pack, nor could he see the valley below nor the ocean beyond it; but as he stood there, some change seemed to have taken place, making his mouth more grim.

They watched Koropok go sadly. Trading with the Japanese was unpleasant.

Half audibly, he said, "Here we go," and started down the sheer mountainside on a journey which was intended to end in Tokyo.

WHEN he had suggested it, during a discussion in Manila as to the impossibility of anyone remaining undetected in Japan after the inevitable war began, Lieutenant Davies' fellow officers had laughed. So Davies, who had lived with his doctor father among the Ainu, had a Chinese tailor make him an *eta* jacket, and then walked about the Japanese quarter as if he were newly arrived from Japan.

His C.O., seeing the Nipponese kick and curse the supposed pariah, had sent Davies to headquarters.

It would be harder to fool the spy-conscious Japanese in Japan when war was a fact, Llewelyn Davies had admitted, but if he could be set ashort somewhere on the north-Japan coast, in fog, he believed it could be done. Swarthy, stocky, he looked very like an Ainu; his Welch ancestry was proof that his beard would grow rapidly. He spoke the clipped Ainu dialect. Once landed, he would get to the interior, be accepted by the friendly *keto-jin* as someone from another *saramba,* and try to get such a commission from them that the Japanese police would not doubt what he did on his return to a coastal city. After that, Tokyo.

The details were worked out. He was told what one man might accomplish in the capital. It had not been necessary to explain to him what detection would mean. He had known that in Manila. And he knew now, as he stood on the ridge, what happened to an officer caught in the clothing of a native.

The last white man he had seen was when the sub had come to the surface, in a ghostly white fog, and he had shaken hands, hard, before swimming ashore with his jacket, head-band, belt, moccasins wrapped in oiled paper. It was over a month later when, as "Koropok," he listened to the tale brought to the mountain settlement by an Ainu hunter, a tale of a great Japanese victory at a place called the Bay of Gems, which could have been Pearl Harbor, and at Manila also.

Waiting, after that, had been horrible. He couldn't trade in the coastal city without the chief's authorization, which the Ainu would not give until all of the *sake* was gone and more was needed. He had not dared search for the bottles and empty them, lest he be found out and lose what he had earned, the chief's confidence in his sobriety. No weeks ever passed more slowly.

What, actually, was going on? Had there been a surprise attack? How was the fleet doing? The air command at Manila? His friends? Had any been shot down?

He shook his head to get thought out of it, and plunged down the slope. It was hours later, when the forest had thinned enough so he could see the sky changing to the maroon and sienna of sunset, before he heard sound which began like quail in the underbrush but grew to an eastward thrumming.

Jap imitation of Daimler-Benz engines, Davies decided. *The bombers which China calls butcher wagons.*

He slept that night where the hills rolled down to the rich plain; by noon he was crossing, on ditch-paths, the luxuriant fields, although, as he had when going up to the mountains, he avoided the houses and circled the villages. A hedge around a pasture was his next bed, where he slept fitfully, because an Ainu trader would be robbed by any farmer or coolie who could overpower him.

On the third day he reached the coast. Prepared as he was for the inevitable, it was still not easy to bow submissively when he was pushed off sidewalks. Youngsters in uniforms, returning from school, screamed *"Inu"* and *"Ai-no-ko"* at him which, while something like "Ainu," meant dog and beast. Was he carrying his trash as a present for his hairy and cowardly *Amerika-jin* brothers across the sea, who were already defeated? The first rock was thrown; but although Davies covered his head with his arms and, to the growing crowd's delight, appeared to cringe, he was satisfied because this proved the perfection of his masquerade. Larger boys, egged

on by men, tried to tear the pack off his back until a policeman shoved through and pushed the *keto-jin* along the street toward the station.

There, the authorization for Koropok's trading was scrutinized, and "Koropok" answered questions as to his residence, age, condition, and any descendants he had dared sire until the sergeant was satisfied. The contents of the sack were examined; and when Davies replaced what had been dumped on the floor two rolls of bark-cloth were missing.

WHEN the inquisition was over, and a permit to go about the city had been pinned on Davies' jacket, the sergeant remarked that Kogoro Shohei was a generous merchant, who always gave traders a bottle of *sake* as a gift.

And pays you for sending him customers to be cheated, Davies thought. But there was every reason why he should follow the recommendation, and, when he had passed under the victory banners above the shop's doorway, why he should take the bowl of tepid liquor held out to him by the smirking merchant. Shohei insisted on giving the trader a second and third bowl; then the travesty began.

The Japanese knew what Ainu traders wanted. However, he said, "*Kono shina yasui;* these are cheap," as he held up combs, dolls, watch fobs.

"*Hanahada waru' kara,*" Davies wanted to retort. "Cheap and bad." Instead, he shook his head. "Only *sake,*" he said.

Did he not know there was war? *Sake* was scarce. Why, four big wolfskins would purchase only one small bottle in these times.

This was the opening. Davies protested weakly, "If I bring back so little, the chief will beat me." He yawned. "How sleepy I am," and then let the merchant have a look at the bait. "I have heard there are distant places where a person can drink as much as he wishes. Is that true, Shohei-san?"

Davies, eyes half closed, seemingly befuddled, watched how the merchant swallowed, and how his eyes narrowed. Yes, agreed Shohei, there were such places. "I do not blame you for being frightened," he went on. "The chief will be sure you drank the *sake,* which in truth you never received. But . . . why go back? Perhaps I can arrange matters so you can live where *sake* is cheap."

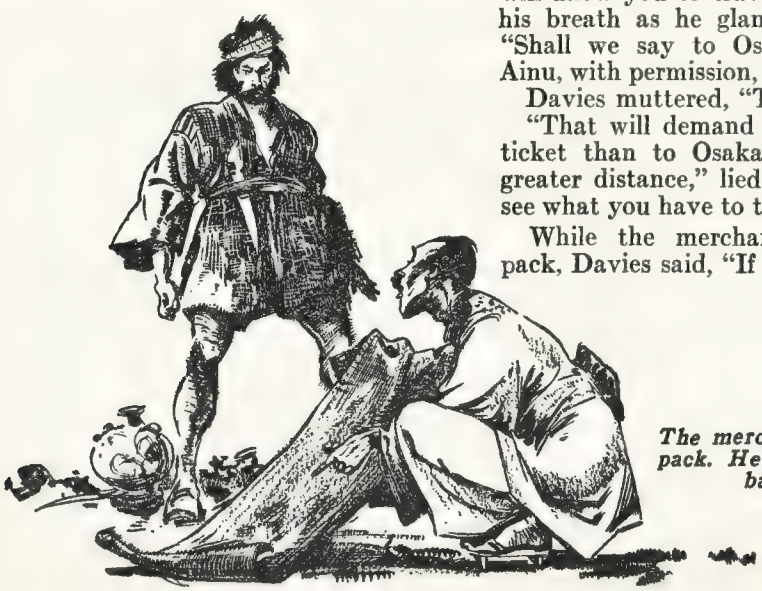
"I have no money to go anywhere," Davies mumbled.

"The goods may be enough so I can trade you a ticket for them. If I am able to do so, I myself will attempt to obtain the permission of the authorities which will allow you to travel." He sucked in his breath as he glanced at the pack. "Shall we say to Osaka? Or Tokyo? Ainu, with permission, may go to either."

Davies muttered, "Tokyo."

"That will demand a more expensive ticket than to Osaka, because it is a greater distance," lied Shohei. "Let me see what you have to trade."

While the merchant examined the pack, Davies said, "If I do not return, I



The merchant examined the pack. He said the cloth was badly woven.

have robbed men of my village," which was something he hated to do. Revenge for what they suffered was the only recompense he could give the friendly Ainu.

Shohei acted as if he had not heard. This knife-haft, he said, was badly carved. This cloth was poorly woven. A pot was cracked. Oh, such miserable things! There was hardly enough to pay for any ticket at all.

The merchant, Davies knew, would boast of the deal, telling how, after cheating an Ainu, he had fooled him into thinking that the *eta* quarter of Tokyo was paradise. Davies hoped that Shohei and the police sergeant would choke over the broiled-eel feast with which they would celebrate their profit and cleverness.

While Shohei haggled for passage in the morning, Davies wandered about, saved from worse than curses by the permit. What he heard numbed him, although it couldn't be true. Manila, Singapore, Java, Bataan? Corregidor? In spite of his disbelief, he shivered as he listened to the exultation of a mitered Shinto priest who read the latest communiqué while standing beneath a victory gate's symbolic mirror. The Japanese held a pine branch which he dipped into a bucket of *sake* and sprinkled over his audience as he shouted; but when he saw an Ainu he stopped the purifying rite until the offensive hairy one was removed.

A Shinto priest shouted the latest communiqué from Bataan.

Davies asked for his knife when Shohei gave him the ticket, but was informed a weapon was not needed in Tokyo; there were no bears there. A few *sen* were given him with which to buy food, and a square of cloth in which to wrap it. And a bottle of inferior *sake*. Into it Davies managed to put a little wolf's-bane. If the aconite were poisonous enough to kill wolves, it ought to be a good thing for a man who was in danger of being hanged to have with him.

The ship he boarded was too small and old for real war use. Solemn boys of sixteen, called for final training, stood rigidly at the rail as the vessel moved off; they cried, "*Banzai!*" in answer to farewells from the pier.

When the rusty coaster began to pitch and roll, they squatted miserably on a deck which was piled with crates of pigs and bamboo cages filled with ducks.

Davies was content. He was "Koropok"; the authorities had sworn to it. He was officially allowed to go to Tokyo. He would arrive there as an Ainu, and would be taken by police to the *eta* district where pariahs lived.

The ship's flag snapped. A recruit had another, a furled war flag which banged to the deck when the boat rolled, and the sergeant in charge, enraged at the desecration, ordered the seasick recruit to prostrate himself. The others, as the noncom yelled at them, sang,

The rays of the Imperial Power
Flash from the soldiers' helmets;
Bright as the sun and moon
They daze the world,

until the sergeant decided spirits had

been properly raised. To make sure of it, he had the Ainu stand before them, and pointed out similarities of Ainu and American dogs. It was easy to understand, the sergeant said, as Davies cowered, why the war was being won.

"KOROPOK" was the last to leave the ship when it docked; he had spent hours below deck when the vessel was passing through fortified areas. In Tokyo, questions were pelted at him; he was slapped for stupidity and again for being an Ainu. His permit was read and reread, and the signatures compared with recorded ones. A fat finger was thrust into the bottle and then sucked. The examiner spat to rid his mouth of the slight tingle which he believed came from cheap *sake*. Davies was stripped, and knew fear as sharp eyes probed every inch of him.

At the end, he was taken beyond the railway belting Tokyo and to the suburb leading to the *eta* quarter. He could expect no welcome from hungry outcasts. Better hide the bottle, too, before reaching their huts. Making sure he was unwatched, Davies pawed out a hole where a twisted conifer grew at a bend in the path, and concealed the bottle in it.

There were ditches, black with stagnant water, on both sides of the path. The American knew he was nearing the quarter when he saw children, in rags, sitting on the dirt, doing nothing. The village itself, rows of mud hovels with walls a scant six feet apart and the thatched roofs broken, was in the next hollow. No voice was raised when a stranger entered; there were no dogs to bark. Davies had to stoop to avoid the sour kimonos drying between the rows; he could see, through the doorless openings, men and women sitting in idleness, prohibited even in war time from anything except butchering, scavenging, tanning, and the repairing of *geta*, wooden Japanese clogs, at night, in the city.

Among the outcasts, Davies had been told, were descendants of *samurai* who had preferred life to honorable *hara-kiri*. And criminals, after serving their terms, went to the villages, married *eta* women, but never forgot that they were of higher caste. It was one of these who finally accosted the newcomer.

"I have come a long way," Davies said timidly. "Permit me to remain. I will do whatever work you demand. I—"

"Have you money?" demanded Keisa the thief. "No? Then go away."

Davies pleaded, "Where can I go? I wish I could return to my *saramba*, where I carved objects of wood to be traded for *sake*, and—"

"*Ho!* You can carve? Money is to be made by repairing *geta*." Keisa blew out his cheeks. "You shall go into Tokyo at night, shouting, '*Na-osh!*' and persons wishing to have their broken *geta* mended will come out. They will pay you. You will bring the coins to me. Is that understood?"

"Then I may stay?"

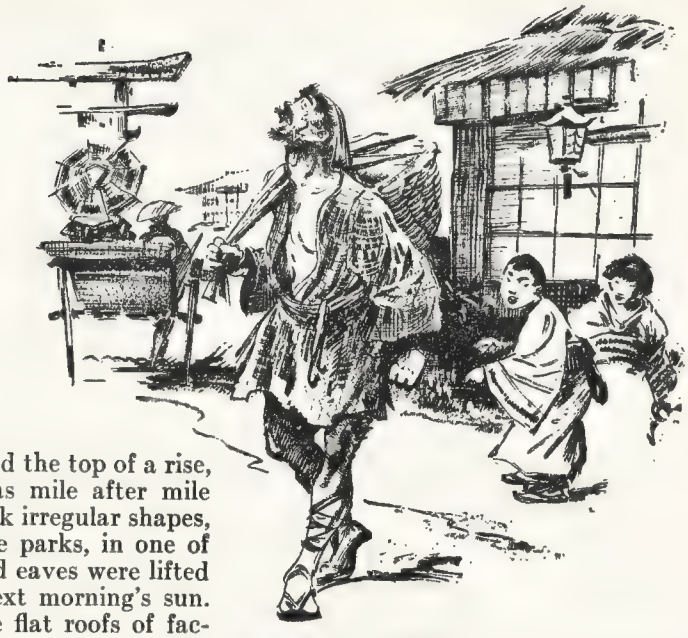
Keisa warned, "That depends on how many *sen* you earn."

Wrinkled *eta* men showed "Koropok" how clogs were repaired; the younger men, by police order, worked in tanneries and slaughter-houses. Old women guided his brown fingers in the x-knot used if the old *geta* needed new toe straps. There were no girls around; all had been taken by the tea houses. Finally, the newcomer was given rice soup and pickled radish, and, at sundown, sent to cry his trade.

It was a night of stars. When the *geta*-mender steadied his voice and called out "*Naaa-osh!*" in the residential district where he was walking, paper windows spread inner lights into the street like the moon's radiance. Somewhere someone laughed. A camphor tree lifted sweet, shining leaves over a bamboo fence; a pine had yellow candles alight. Clogs clattered on paving stones.

Another step nearer the impossible had been managed. Another planned step. *If I'm careful now*, Davies thought, *I've got a chance to produce.*

Here and there tiled roofs gleamed, but almost all of the houses were thatched, just as they had been in the past, despite the terrible fires which had razed whole sections of the city. The districts where the Japanese lived would become caldrons if incendiaries fell.



He went deeper into Tokyo crying "Naaa-osh!" the geta-menders' call.

When Davies reached the top of a rise, he could see Tokyo as mile after mile of thatched roofs. Dark irregular shapes, when studied, must be parks, in one of which a temple's gilded eaves were lifted expectantly for the next morning's sun. Davies sought out the flat roofs of factories, where men and women must be turning out the planes, tanks, guns, ammunition for Japan's war, but none were to be discerned. So Intelligence's information to Manila had been correct; the roofs of the tremendous war plants were covered with false roofs of thatch, making them indistinguishable from the homes of the sprawling city.

Davies took a deep breath before crying, "*Naaa-osh!*" and continuing deeper into Tokyo. He would have more competition there, causing Keisa to grumble at the small amount earned, but that couldn't be helped.

There were compensations. At two in the morning, eating a bowl of sticky *oden* at a low food shop, he listened to *kurumayas* who, with their cart-shafts steadied, discussed the war, now almost won. It did not make happy listening, but on hearing that *seiyo-jin* flyers always bombed schools, children, temples, and hospitals, Davies hoped that similar lying figured in the Japanese accounts of victories.

A few planes, American, had been here and there, he heard, but had always been driven away in defeat. Soon the *Amerika-jin* would beg for peace. They would be on their knees already if they realized what Nippon was making in the factories.

LITTLE by little, night after night, the *geta*-mender pieced bits of information together, sometimes finding them untrue, sometimes adding what he picked up to his growing store. What he was to do, if it could be done, could probably never be repeated, and there must be no slip. Not now. Not when he was close to accomplishment, so close that, when he was crying his services on the streets in the heart of the city, the palms of his hands would become moist.

He had to be careful never to remain long on one street, lest the police, who always stopped him and demanded to see his permit, become suspicious.

It was a strange sort of duty. To be utterly alone. It was less terrible to be kicked as a pariah than to try to sleep in the daytime in the filth of the outcast settlement and fight not to think of everyone at home. Davies' face had grown gaunt under his beard, and his nerves were frayed to the point where it seemed impossible to hold down the anger within him when Keisa would search him for withheld coins. Hot red rage would surge up into his throat; he could feel the bristling of his flesh, and his heart would pound. But, in his sleeves, he could dig his nails into his palms, and, under his beard, bite his lip.

Nothing must prevent him from going out of the village at night and being in Tokyo. Nothing. Every night which passed, with the same moon shining on palaces and unseen pariah hovels, and, as Davies learned, on prison camps, must be bringing the night of his duty the nearer.

Excited voices roused him on a mid-morning; there had been, a pariah said, the sound of guns, faint and distant, and a boy with sharp eyes had believed he had seen something, high and with wings, to the east, over Tokyo. A bird of metal, yes; but while there had been many such birds in the skies, never before had there been any shooting. Perhaps it was an enemy bird?

It could be reconnaissance, Davies thought. *If it is, this is the night. Not in a day or two, the way it's ordinarily done. Tonight.* He stretched out again. *I've got to sleep,* he told himself. But sleep would not come again.

He was wide awake when Keisa entered the hut.

"At last I have something for you," the Japanese announced. "*Kore!* There is a need for an *eta* to sweep out a prison. To carry buckets and messages. *Ho!* You will find it pleasant. Captured soldiers are kept there." Keisa began to laugh. "All of them will lose face when a pariah gives them orders."

Davies asked, "When is this to be done?"

"Today. The reward will surpass that earned by mending *geta,* Koropok. Thank me for arranging such pleasant labor."

Davies bowed as if grateful. Today of all days he must be in the city. But panic clutched at him. Should he kill Keisa now, and escape to Tokyo? The terrified *eta* would report a murder to the police. Then Davies knew what had to be done. He said, "Because you are so kind, you have shamed me. I . . . I have kept *sen* which should have gone to you, and—"

"Give them to me now!"

"Koropok's" head went lower. "I cannot. I bought a bottle of *sake.* But I . . . I didn't drink it. I hid it."

Keisa's eyes wandered about the bare hut. "Where have you hidden it? Take me there at once. It is a lucky thing for you that it is untouched."

When the round bottle had been taken from the mud beside the path, Keisa grabbed it from Davies and drew the stopper. Standing on the path, the Japanese took a preliminary mouthful. "You were cheated," he said. "It is bad *sake.* But it will be better in the belly than in the mouth." Keisa drained the bottle. "That is how a man drinks," he grinned. "Sit down, Koropok, and I will tell you why I have been called Keisa the Wolf, and of some of the things which I have done."

Davies sat beside him and listened. Five minutes passed as Keisa boasted, and ten; and what Davies heard made him feel that wolf's-bane had poisoned the proper person. At the end, "Koropok" carried the dead Japanese back to the *eta,* along with the empty bottle. The old men shrugged; the old women dug a hole, lined it with grass, put the thief's body in it, poured water over the grave, and, after breaking the defiled water tub, remembered enough more of Ainu custom to make a crude spear of the pieces and set it at the grave's foot. Keisa had died, a hog, from *sake.* All had smelled it on him. The police would be angry if informed of such an unimportant thing.

With Keisa dead, "Koropok" asked for food to take with him before setting out on his customary duty. Cold boiled millet and fish scraps were wrapped in newspapers brought by the scavenger-*eta* to fill the winter quilts; Davies did the wrapping and was generous with the paper. He left the hovels as early as he dared.

A MOON shone over Tokyo. Great droning cockchafers dropped on the road to the city like splashes of summer rain, and, where mud of the *eta* ditch oozed darkly into the silver of a canal, the frogs chanted.

The Japanese had been smart in keeping foreigners away from factories, but had been too clever in announcing that war plants were underground and therefore bombproof. Underground plants in a city built on marsh? It was no wonder

that the men in Intelligence didn't believe it.

Davies bought two cigarettes and a tiny box of *tsukegi,* sulphur matches, lighting his first cigarette since reaching Japan. How good it tasted! It was worth the cost, which had been his work in paring full-size *geta* down for a child's use. He smoked steadily, and only when the tobacco was ash did he cry, "*Naaa-osh! Naaa-osh!*" and follow the street deeper into the city.

Eleven became midnight. The small hours, *ichi-ji, ni-ji,* passed leadenly. Had there really been a reconnaissance plane? American?

Because Davies no longer sought new streets, he had to keep in shadow whenever a policeman strutted along, lest the officer wonder why a *geta*-mender remained in one locality. He avoided street and gate lights; he never quite reached the canal and its bridges, nor the long blank wall near it, a wall which, like those of the houses bordering it, had wooden eaves and thatch above. But he was never far away. This took care, because there was no way of knowing whether the guards of Japan's principal and concealed arsenal might have been re-posted. Davies believed that more damage, to material, pride, and faith, would result from a blasting of the arsenal behind the wall and under the false roof, and in the heart of Tokyo, than from anything else. He had been told to select the target. This was it.

Without warning, the lights went out. For the time it took Davies to pull the food from his bundle and drop it over a fence, nothing happened. Then a siren began to wail, to be joined by others until the thatched roofs quivered with the sound. Davies was moving toward the blank wall, the paper in which his food had been wrapped concealed under his jacket. Darkness was his ally, although his eyes, already accustomed to the change, could see things in the soft grayness. Darkness assisted him. It, and obedience. Not a Japanese came out of a dwelling to stare up at the sky, nor, after that, to see him. Japanese obeyed orders.

The mechanical shrieking ended as abruptly as it had started, leaving a queer deathly silence. An emptiness. A void.

Davies could almost hear the banging of his heart. Ahead of him was the wall of the arsenal. To his right and left were the high bamboo fences of houses. He had no way of knowing what the guards might be doing, what their orders were, but there would be no lights during a black-out. That was certain.

Davies lay on the dirt, back against a fence. The silence was enormous. It was so complete that Davies feared anyone near might hear him as he drew breath, but it enabled him to detect a sound hardly greater than a rat in the thatch . . . and he looked up at the moment a Japanese soldier on the false roof of the arsenal looked down. Each saw the other at the same instant.

Will he shoot, Davies wondered, *or know that a gun-flash makes light?*

The soldier, obeying black-out orders, did not shoot. Davies could see the tensing, crouching of the figure above him. He relaxed his hold on the papers, but tried not to move, lest any motion cause the Japanese to call out. Then the soldier, with bayonet already fixed for guard duty, sprang. Davies rolled. The blade ripped into the bamboo of the fence, and was caught and held by the tough wood for the fraction of time during which Davies' hands found his assailant's throat. The silence was unbroken as the Japanese died.

Had anyone seen the soldier jump? Would he be missed? Then Davies saw, as he struggled for control, a light in the sky, far up, which grew and grew and brightened until it could never be a star.

The flare, as it fell, changed from silvery white to yellow, then to fiery copper. An anti-aircraft gun barked from Dangozaka Hill; guns behind the barracks in the Imperial Palace grounds crashed furiously before the first echo had battered across Tokyo. The cacophonous sound had a rhythm of terror in it. A light stabbed up. A second scythed in a nervous arc from east to west. More searchlights probed the heavens, crossing and crisscrossing with nervous haste, and making white and geometric patterns under the moon.

Davies, by contrast, was deliberate.

This was it. He hadn't done the impossible to fail now. The guard's corporal wouldn't be worrying about a missing soldier while the raid was actually on. Davies thought, cold as ice, *O.K., fellows. And if some of you are way up top-side, have a look.* He didn't mean the pilots, navigators, bombardiers in the planes; he meant the men who might have been killed before war had been declared. Men he had known. Chuck—Joe—George—Bill Hoyt—Sorensen, the technical sergeant ready for pensioning, but staying on until new men learned their stuff.

DAVIES twisted one of the newspapers loosely, and lit it. When it flamed, he held it high under the overhanging eave of dry thatch above the arsenal wall. Fire ran up the warm straw before a guard could yell. Davies had a second blaze started twenty feet away, just as the first order was shouted.

Flame rose high, vermilion and scarlet shot through with brassy hot tongues of yellow, surely visible to the watching men in the bombers.

"There you are, fellows," said Davies. "There you are."

A spatter of sparks swirled up, floating as if buoyed, and then settling softly on a roof behind Davies; in moments the alley would become a furnace. Davies had no reason to remain. He had indicated the target. Lord, how the thatch burned; what were the bombardiers waiting for? What did they want?

The first bomb fell. A miss. Wide.

I've got to get away from here, Davies knew; and then it came to him that this was exactly what the men above were giving him a chance to do.

Had soldiers been posted where the alley met the street? If so, they would shoot him, as an *eta,* because the combination of rage and fear drove Japanese out of their senses. Instead of trying to go along the alley, Davies went through the gate of the nearest garden and into the patch of grass, stones, and sand there. He was not worried about the appearance of whoever lived in the house; the Japanese civilians would stay inside even while bombs fell, until given a signal, an order, to do otherwise. He climbed the low fence to the next garden; he sprawled over a miniature bridge in it and went headlong. The noise he made must have been covered by the shouted orders as the alley was being searched.

Where were the bombers? When Davies reached the corner house, and turned to parallel the street to the arsenal, the first flames had been beaten out, but others, from sparks, were blossoming. A drum began to beat. A fire-drum. The signal of fire, as it had been ever since Perry and his ships had reached Japan bringing America's friendship, when Tokyo's name had been Yeddo.

Davies hid behind a stone lantern until the family in the house's garden walked dutifully out at the order of the drums; then he followed them into a street which was packing solidly with civilians. Black eyes in round yellow-brown faces stared at the roofs, to see how far the fire might spread. No Japanese householder looked any higher until there was a powerful ominous droning overhead.

Here it comes, thought Davies.

He had to wait. To see. But, even if he had wished to get away, it would have been impossible to have gone through the crowd. The Japanese stood stockstill. Sudden doubt, astonishment, and an increasing and steadily growing fear, turned them, as they waited, to an immobile and paralyzed mass.

A bomber, held in searchlight beams, wheeled like a ghostly eagle, escaping the excited firing of the Japanese gunners. Then, all at once, commands and gunfire and drums were obliterated as bombs whined down, piercing false and true roofs alike, to reach the stored high explosives in the arsenal.

Blue flame flickered; explosion followed explosion until the ground shook and the air seemed shattered. Dive bombers swooped, leveled off, and roared up again. A searchlight's glare vanished, shot out. Wildly hurrying machine-gunners were unable to reach their posts, were sprayed to earth. On the hill near the temple, where tiles reflected fire until they were golden, and the dragons ornamenting the bronze cornices glinted evilly, an anti-aircraft unit was put out

of action. In the grounds of the Imperial Palace the Shinto priests poured libations of wine and water around the shelter of the descendant of the sun god; but the sky was brighter now, with flame, than the sun had ever made it.

The massed Japanese on the street had not moved. In Davies' ears, penetrating the thunder over Tokyo, was a new sound, a sound like a hiss, shrill and hollow, as breaths were sucked in. Panic. *They've been told this'd never happen,* thought Davies. *It'll be like Dad said took place during the big earthquake, when there was no one to give orders.* Someone giggled horribly. *They're breaking now,* Davies was sure, because the hissing had become like the mounting of a gigantic wave, an upward surge which could not be longer held back.

When it broke, it carried the Japanese along the street in a stampede of stark unreasoning terror, and Davies with them. Now, the Japanese did not curse him, nor even see him as a pariah, a despised Ainu. There could be only one thing in their frenzied heads, Davies knew. Escape. More than an arsenal had been bombed, and more than munitions destroyed.. Tokyo had been stripped naked.

Davies wished he dared wave, even if the fellows up above couldn't have seen. He moved with the shuffling, stumbling crowd, seeing the open mouths, hearing the gasps of fright, until officers with swords and soldiers with bayonets hacked and jabbed and shrieked to end the panic, themselves as berserk as the others.

The sky was on fire. Hot, purple smoke formed clouds which smothered the Imperial Palace, and, as the bombers swung over river and bay, began to rise above the docks, navy yard, and naval anchorage.

Davies went with the crowd until the droning diminished to the sound of cockchafers near the *eta* settlement. Then he worked his way to the throng's edge until he could slip into a narrow street, deserted by all occupants. Perhaps something like this, Davies hoped, might be done again, while he remained with the pariahs here. If it could not, before too long he ought to be able to return to the mountains.

Whichever should be done, right now, was unimportant.

How swell the prisoners must feel, Lieutenant Llewelyn Davies thought, as he walked across Tokyo and toward the pariah hovels. He felt pretty good himself, and it was difficult not to whistle as he walked.

DOWN TO BRASS

"LOOKS like yuh've had a raid," remarked Skipper Pring. He was sipping a rum punch in the office of Whitey Smeed's trading store on Paou Island.

"It wasn't a raid," Smeed growled, scowling out at a wide, deep crater just beyond the compound. "Nothin' worth raidin' here. I figger it was just some Jap bomber on the way home from a task flight. Likely it had failed to find the convoy it was lookin' for, so it just jettisoned its bombs anywhere. Made it easier to land, back at its base."

"When did it happen?" Pring asked.

"About a week ago. It killed a coupla natives and scared the rest of 'em stiff. Trade ain't been worth a plugged shillin' since then."

Pring stirred his rum. Then his pale eye roved to appraise the pictures of more than a hundred charmers which Whitey Smeed had tacked on the office walls.

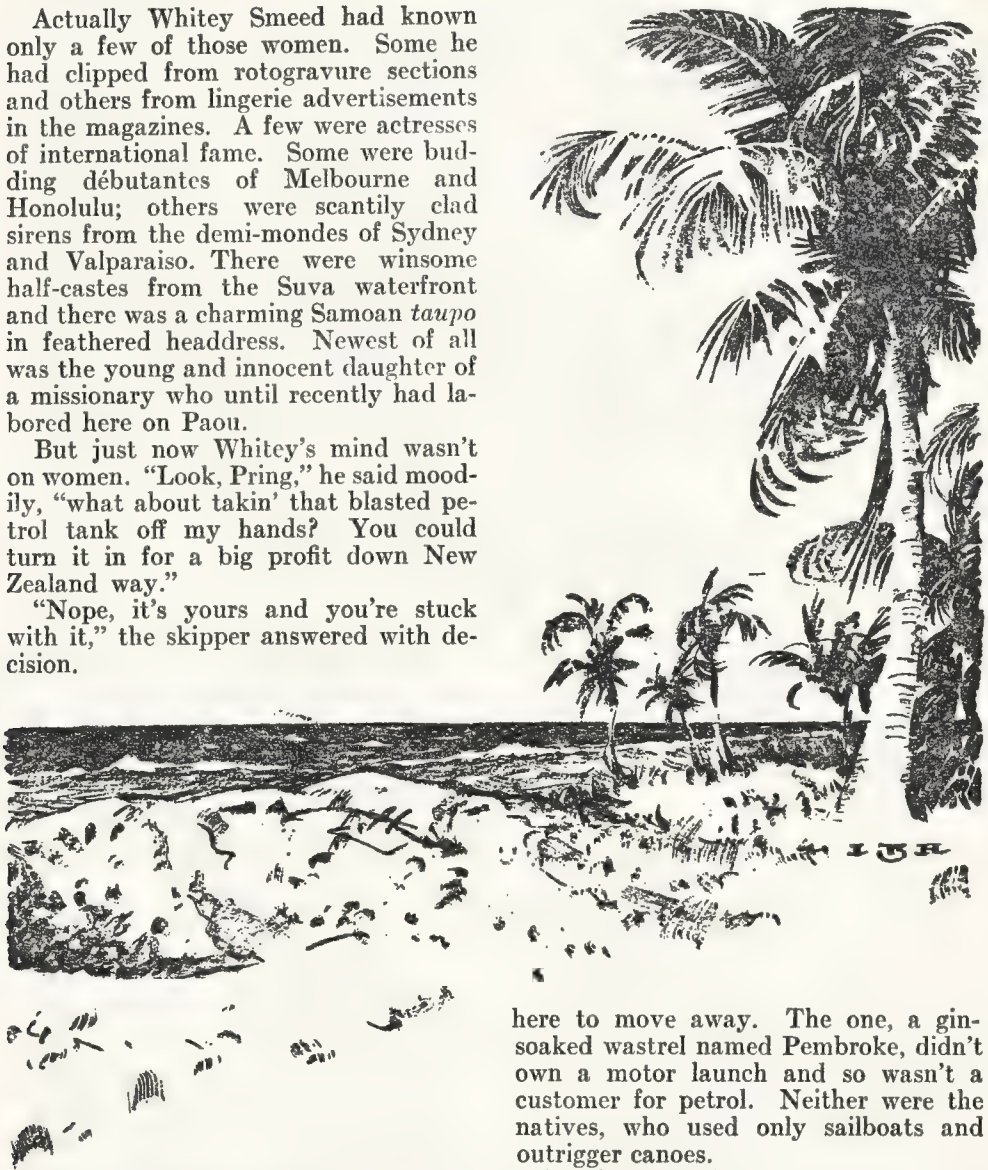
"They'll get yuh in trouble some day, them females will!" the skipper predicted with a chuckle. "Them's too many females for any one man, Whitey."

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON

"No copra. Cash in hand. That's flat!" Smeed emphasized his dictum with a twang of the guitar.

TACKS

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON



Actually Whitey Smeed had known only a few of those women. Some he had clipped from rotogravure sections and others from lingerie advertisements in the magazines. A few were actresses of international fame. Some were budding débutantes of Melbourne and Honolulu; others were scantily clad sirens from the demi-mondes of Sydney and Valparaiso. There were winsome half-castes from the Suva waterfront and there was a charming Samoan *taupo* in feathered headdress. Newest of all was the young and innocent daughter of a missionary who until recently had labored here on Paou.

But just now Whitey's mind wasn't on women. "Look, Pring," he said moodily, "what about takin' that blasted petrol tank off my hands? You could turn it in for a big profit down New Zealand way."

"Nope, it's yours and you're stuck with it," the skipper answered with decision.

His crew had just unloaded the tank on the beach. It was of riveted steel, twelve feet in diameter and six high, and its capacity was five thousand gallons. Smeed had ordered it just before Pearl Harbor, paying cash in advance, as a storage tank for petrol. But now all his petrol customers were gone. The fighting in the Solomons, only five hundred miles westerly from Paou, had caused all but one of the white planters here to move away. The one, a gin-soaked wastrel named Pembroke, didn't own a motor launch and so wasn't a customer for petrol. Neither were the natives, who used only sailboats and outrigger canoes.

"Besides which," Skipper Pring summed up callously, "the tradin' racket here's all shot anyway, long as a war's on. What with all shippin' in war transport, pretty soon there won't be any ships to haul away your copra. So yuh'll have to clean your shelves and git. You can sell the natives everything but that tank. How much did it cost yuh?"

"Two hundred quid," Smeed said glumly.

"By the way," Pring said, "I hear a Yank freighter was torpedoed the other day, somewhere atween here and the Gilberts. Did any survivors get ashore on Paou?"

"Not that I know of," Smeed said.

Skipper Pring drained his brandy glass. "Time I'm uppin' anchor, if I'm usin' this tide." He rose and moved, catlike in his deck sneakers, toward the door.

There he turned and with a toothy grin again surveyed the gallery of beauties on the walls. "You sure have been around, Whitey! But better watch out! They'll leave yuh grounded on the shoals of grief some day, them wimmin will."

When the skipper was gone, Smeed noticed that one of the pictures was loose. He pressed a brass-headed thumb tack through the loose corner, impaling it rigidly on the plank wall. Each of the exhibits was held in place with four thumb tacks, the shining brass heads adding a garish glitter to the galaxy of charm displayed.

The trader lighted a cheroot and went out on the porch from which he could see Pring skiffing to his anchored tramp. An on-shore wind swayed the palms along the beach. A gust of it ruffled Smeed's wavy yellow hair, so he took a pocket comb and preened it into place. For by long habit he was a neat man, still vain and a little handsome in spite of bags now puffing under his eyes. He still kept his whites pressed and he shaved every day. Long ago he had learned that a man living by his wits can't afford to be slouchy. It was always easier to cheat other men, or to charm women, if you groomed yourself for the part.

A little later he watched Pring's tramp nose out through the reef channel. This left only Smeed's own seventy-foot launch anchored in the lagoon. No other ship was scheduled to call here for more than a month. Paou Island was of small importance, its affairs being administered from Port Louis, two hundred miles across blue water. The staff at Port Louis came over for an inspection not oftener than once a year.

By the time they came again, Whitey Smeed would be gone. Now he stood glaring balefully at the petrol tank which Pring's crew had skidded up on the beach. Was there any way to unload it on the natives here? They were a thrifty people, the Paou Islanders, and Smeed knew that some of the chiefs had tucked away cash savings and perhaps a few small pearls.

If he could only make them want that tank!

AT sundown Clyde Pembroke came in for a quart of Scotch. The planter was a bit shaky, but sober for once.

"Well, Clyde," Smeed said as he wrapped up the quart, "I guess we're the only two whites left on the island."

"Three, you mean," Pembroke corrected.

"Three?"

"*M-m-m.* There's that Yankee sailor."

"What Yankee sailor?"

"He's a chap got washed ashore on our reef today, half drowned and weak as a kitten. His ship bumped into a torpedo, likely."

Smeed recalled Pring mentioning such a catastrophe. "Any other survivors?" he asked.

"If so they made toward Port Louis in a life boat," Pembroke said. "Tuo says only this one sailor kid got ashore on Paou."

Tuo was high chief at Pai, one of the five villages on Paou Island.

"Where's this sailor now?"

"Tuo's women are taking care of him," the planter said, using his cork helmet to fan away flies. "They give him a coconut-oil rubdown—makin' a bit of a fuss over him they are."

Pembroke left and Smeed dismissed the news from his mind. He wasn't concerned with castaways unless they had cash in hand.

Sauntering into his office he cast a possessive eye over the hundred-odd women pictured there. Then he sat down with his account books to check up. Skipper Pring had taken away all his accumulated copra, paying cash for it. In another two weeks Smeed could sell out the balance of his merchandise stock and be ready to go. *The only thing I'll have to leave on the beach,* he

brooded, *is that damned two-hundred-quid tank.* And Smeed loved two hundred pounds as he loved his right eye.

That night he heard a mournful chant from Pai village. He had heard the same thing last night, and the night before, and in fact every night since a homing Jap plane had jettisoned bombs here. The natives were living in terror—believing that the bombing had been deliberate and would happen again.

They were a timid people, shelterless except for palm trees and grass-thatched roofs. So their morale was in shreds and. . . .

Suddenly Smeed saw a way to capitalize on it. His sly mind went to work at once. For an hour he sat over his rum, scheming. Then he assembled certain articles of comfort and carried them outside.

WHEN natives came looking for Smeed at dawn, they found the store deserted. But the twanging of a guitar drew them to a petrol tank, brand new, on the beach nearby. The six-inch valve outlet near the bottom of the tank was open. The end of a ladder stuck out through a three-foot square manhole in the roof.

Another short ladder leaned against the tank. The hunch-backed chief, Tuo, climbed the ladder and looked down through the open manhole.

What he saw was in effect a circular room twelve feet in diameter, high enough to stand erect in, with steel walls, roof and floor, and with an open valve for light should the roof trap be closed. On a cot therein reclined Whitey Smeed, strumming a guitar.

Smeed grinned up at the peering Tuo. "Mornin', chief. Have they dropped any more bombs?"

"That is what we would talk with you about, please," Tuo said. "My people are afraid. Will they return to bomb us again?"

"Maybe," Smeed said. "So I'm takin' no chances. I figured this was comin', months ago. That's why I ordered this bomb shelter."

"A bomb shelter?" exclaimed Tuo.

Since the islanders did not understand English, Smeed explained it to him in the native language. A bomb shelter, he said, had to be made of steel. Wooden shelters were no good, because a bomb would set the wood on fire. He did not tell them that even a steel shelter like this one would be utterly demolished by a direct hit.

Tuo thumped the tank with his knuckles. "It is very strong." He sighed enviously. "How much is the price, please?"

"Two hundred guineas," Smeed said. That would make a two hundred shilling profit.

"How much copra, please?"

"No copra, Tuo. Cash in hand. I'd have to order another one for myself, and pay cash for it." Smeed rose from his cot and climbed halfway up the ladder. "That's flat." He emphasized his dictum with a twang of the guitar.

"I will speak with my people," Tuo murmured, and withdrew.

In mid-morning he returned with a decision. "It will not shelter all my village," the old hunch-back told Smeed. "But it will hold the mothers and the infants. We buy, please."

He had been able to raise one hundred and eighty guineas. This had come from caches under grass mats and from old gourds and shells, each *matai* contributing his accumulated savings. Tuo also produced a small, flawed pearl which Smeed accepted for the twenty guineas lacking.

He locked it in his safe. Then he showed them how to insert pry poles under the tank, raising it one side at a time until they were able to slide pandanus log rollers under it. Once on the rollers, and with the entire village to push, moving the tank down the hard-packed sand of the beach wasn't difficult.

By mid-afternoon it had been rolled into a shell-paved lane at Pai village, between two rows of grass-roof *fales.*

A native girl plucked at Smeed's arm. "Have you seen our visitor?" she asked shyly.

Curious, Smeed followed her to the guest *fale* where, on a pile of grass mats, the recently rescued sailor lay convalescing. Although a week's beard cov-

ered the sailor's face Smeed could see that he was young. He was thin and pale. A chubby brown boy sat by, fanning away flies.

The derelict's deep-sunk blue eyes brightened at sight of a white man. "Hi there, mate. Mason's my name. Lee Mason."

"I'm Smeed. You savvy the lingo here?"

"Not a chirp," Lee Mason said ruefully. "They've been swell to me, though. You run that store down the beach?"

"Aye. You an' me an' a chap named Pembroke are the only whites within two hundred miles."

"When can I get a ship out of here?"

"Likely to be a month or more," Smeed said.

Lee Mason's eyes strayed to the oil tank around which villagers were now heaping a terrace of sand. "What do they want with that thing?" he asked.

Smeed shrugged. "That's *their* business," he muttered. Turning away, he hoped this sailor would mind his own. *Lucky he doesn't savvy the lingo,* Smeed thought. For in all there were five villages on Paou Island and Smeed saw a way to exploit the other four.

Tramping back to his store he found scores of brown folk huddled in awe about one of the bomb craters. Smeed recognized several as being from other villages than Pai. They had come from a distance to see the devastation.

"What you need," Smeed said to the high chief at Lau village, "is a bomb-proof shelter like Pai's got."

He let it sink in, knowing the Polynesian psychology. When one village makes an improvement, all other villages of the island lose face until they can match it. In his trading Smeed had often taken advantage of such civic rivalry. This time it would be spurred on by a deathly fear of bombs.

TWO days later a committee from Lau called at his store. "We like iron house all same Pai," one said. "We bring copra—"

"You'll bring cash in advance," Smeed cut in. "The mills won't ship me any steel goods now, what with the war shortage, unless I pay cash on the line."

Patiently he made this clear to them. They must bring him cash or pearls to to the value of two hundred guineas. He might accept one-third in copra, but not more than that. When the full purchase price was in hand, he would cruise to Port Louis in his launch and order the tank by wireless.

"You sure you come back?" the Lau chief asked.

"Of course," Smeed said. "I've got my store here, haven't I?" He didn't mention that the store buildings weren't his own. He only leased them from a chain trading syndicate, and so by deserting them he would lose nothing.

The *matais* of Lau closed on Smeed's terms. And within twenty-four hours similar deals had been closed by the natives of Kapu, Aau and Vaiala.

"Fetch the money here right away," Smeed told them. "The sooner I get started, the sooner you'll get those shelters."

That evening he went out to his launch, the *Cecelia.* Its crew of three half-caste Kanakas lounged on the deck. "In the mornin' start loadin'," Smeed said. "Fetch all unsold merchandise from the store and stow it aboard. I'll have to take in some copra on deals I'm puttin' over. Stow it in the hold as fast as it comes in."

Each day for a week hand carts came from all quarters of the island, freighting copra to the store. But Smeed refused to accept more than he could haul in one cargo on the *Cecelia.* The rest came to him in gold sovereigns and in wadded pound notes long hoarded by the villagers.

"Evenin', mate," a cheery voice greeted him one night. Smeed looked up to see Lee Mason framed in his office doorway.

"Hello." The trader's response was not too cordial.

Taking hospitality for granted, Lee Mason came in and sat down. He draped a long, thin leg over the arm of a bamboo chair. He was more bearded than ever, but the sick look was gone from his eyes.

"I see you're loadin' up that launch

o' yours. Takin' a run over Port Louis way, are you?"

"*M-m-m,*" Smeed assented uneasily.

"I'd like to book passage," Lee said.

"My boat ain't licensed to carry passengers," Smeed hedged. He could foresee trouble if he took this Yankee to Port Louis. Mason might tell about these bomb-shelter deals, and the Port Louis officials were in the habit of cracking down on a trader who swindled natives.

"You wouldn't leave me stranded here, would you?" Lee protested.

"You won't be stranded long. There'll be a packet callin' in here in a month or so."

Lee Mason seemed disappointed, but hardly suspicious. He was curious, however, and in a few minutes he inquired: "Say, what's goin' on around here, anyway? I can't talk with these natives, so it's sort o' got me stymied."

"About what?"

"It must have somethin' to do with those bombs that were jettisoned here a while back. But why should *that* worry anybody? It'll never happen again. If the Japs wanted this island, they could just bring a gunboat into the lagoon and help themselves."

"Well?"

"That's what I'm askin' *you*. What about it?"

Smeed lost patience. "And all I'm asking you," he rasped, "is for you to mind your own business."

Lee fixed a blue-eyed stare on him. "Not tryin' to put anything over, are you, Smeed? Those natives've been plenty good to me. They saved my life. I wouldn't want to see anybody put a hook in 'em."

Smeed reddened to the roots of his whitish hair. "Suppose you fan yourself outa here, sailor. I'm busy."

"So you *are* puttin' a hook in 'em," Lee concluded. "I was afraid of that. All right. Maybe I can find that planter fellow—Pembroke's his name, isn't it?—and get the lowdown."

He went briskly out. Presently Smeed heard him accost a native on the beach. "Will you take me to Mr. Pembroke?"

The native only understood the one word, "Pembroke." But it was enough. He set off along a path into the bush, and Lee followed him.

SMEED could only hope that Pembroke would be too drunk to take an interest. The planter had kept aloof from everybody, of late months, coming to the beach only to replenish his liquor supply. Steadily drinking himself into the grave, the man was.

Then Smeed remembered what had made him that way. There'd been a missionary on the island who, with his young and pretty daughter, had boarded with Pembroke. And Pembroke had gone head over heels for the girl. Since he was too old for her and much too dissolute, her father had settled it by moving himself and the girl to another island.

After which Clyde Pembroke had more and more sought consolation in his cups. In his mood of self-pity, he wasn't likely to take up arms for the rights of island natives.

Looking out into the lagoon Smeed saw the dark, anchored shape of the *Cecelia.* Being with full cargo now, she rode low on her Plimsoll line. There was nothing to keep Smeed from putting to sea except that Vaiala village still lacked fifty pounds on its bomb-shelter payment. The chief there had promised to bring it tomorrow. It made a stake worth waiting for, and Smeed wanted to pick the bones clean.

A moon climbed two hours higher over the shore palms. Then Smeed heard footsteps crunching the shell outside. They were brisk, shod steps, so he knew it was no native. From a drawer Smeed took an automatic pistol and wedged it in his belt.

Lee Mason came in with a glint in his eyes. "I got this business logged now, Smeed," he announced.

"So what?"

"Pembroke won't help me any," Lee admitted. "But I did get him to interpret while I questioned his native house boy. You sold a gasoline reservoir to Pai village for two hundred guineas. We'll let that pass, because it might come in handy some day for a hurricane cellar. Or they could use it to keep

copra dry in. But then you went out and took orders from four other villages, collecting in advance."

"And what's the matter with that?"

"The matter is that you can't fill the orders. Under war priorities you couldn't get those tanks delivered here, even if you wanted to. Your game is to skip with the cash."

Smeed sized the sailor up sharply. Lee was still underweight from his ordeal of shipwreck. Ought to be easy to handle, Smeed thought, if he tries getting tough. "What makes you think I aim to skip?" he demanded.

"Your shelves are empty. Everything you've got's loaded on that launch. So you're not coming back. At Port Louis you can sell out, launch, cargo and all, and then fade for keeps."

"Guesses are cheap," Smeed derided.

"It explains why you won't take me to Port Louis. You're leavin' me stranded so I can't tell the commissioner over there."

Lee's eyes shifted to the wall beyond Smeed on which were tacked his photograph gallery of women. "A fair bet is," Lee said thoughtfully, "that you'll join up with a woman somewhere. Maybe one named Cecelia. That's what you call your launch, I notice."

"Try and find her," laughed Smeed. He could afford to be tolerant on that score, because the girl after whom he'd named his craft had long ago passed from his life.

"Or maybe one of the others," Lee said. "I'll bet if the police could check with all of those women, they'd get a damned unsavory pattern of your past —and your future."

"Help yourself," Smeed jeered.

Lee Mason stood looking absorbedly at the pictures, each pinned to the wall with four thumb tacks. "Maybe I will, at that, Smeed." Abruptly he left the store and Smeed heard him tramping down the beach toward Pai.

MIXING himself a rickey, the trader drank damnation to all meddlers. In the morning he'd go to Vaiala and collect that last fifty pounds. Then he'd up anchor for Port Louis.

Although it was now nearly midnight, the entrance of a customer startled Smeed. Was it that damn sailor coming back?

He went into the storeroom and saw with relief that it was only Clyde Pembroke. The planter stood unsteadily on his short legs and his face was blotched.

"I'm outa Scotch again," he said huskily. "Wrap up a quart."

Smeed didn't have any in stock, having sent all unsold merchandise out to the launch. But he was anxious to pamper Pembroke. The planter was minding his own business, and Smeed wanted to keep him that way. "I'm out of Scotch, Clyde. But come into my office and I'll give you some Squareface. On the house, you understand. You've always been a good customer of mine."

Pembroke followed him into the office. It was a long time since he'd been in there. Smeed mixed two gin rickeys and passed one of them to his guest. "Happy days," he said. "Now I'll wrap you up what's left." He reached for a square bottle.

When he looked up, Pembroke was staring at the pictures on the wall. As he stared, the man's sullen, blotched face fired into fury. "Blast you!" he blurted. "I oughta bash your face in!"

"What for?" Smeed asked, gaping.

"Whatta yuh mean puttin' her in right among all those waterfront bawdies?" Pembroke reached out and tore one of the photographs from its thumbtack moorings. "You gotta nerve puttin' her in a harem like that, blast you!"

Smeed tried to placate him. "I didn't mean anything by it, Clyde." He saw that the snapshot which Pembroke had torn from the wall was one which he, Smeed, had taken of the missionary's daughter just before she had left the island; he remembered too that Pembroke had idolized the girl. "Don't get sore, chum," Smeed purred. "Here, take this on the house."

The planter, still boiling, snatched the wrapped quart from him. "I'll take it, but not as a gift." He tossed money on the table and reeled out. Over his shoulder he called back, "I'll scuttle you for this, you—" The maudlin voice faded

out. But Smeed heard him take a direction toward Pai village.

Alarmed, Smeed rushed out and caught up with him. "See here, old chap, where are you goin'?"

Pembroke whirled to face him. His legs were braced wide apart in the sand, and the pitch of his resentment seemed to have sobered him a little. "I'm goin' to help that Yank sailor, like he asked me. We'll put the natives wise. If they don't gang you and make you give that money back, we'll get 'em to—" Fury choked Pembroke for a moment.

"You'll get 'em to do what?"

"They've got a bonito boat with sails. And this Yank's a blue-water sailor—"

Smeed saw it at once. The natives, out after bonito, rarely ventured more than forty miles from shore. They lacked boldness and skill for navigating two hundred miles to Port Louis. But with a deep-sea sailor to help them, and assuming the swindle had been made quite clear to them, they might do it. In which case they could head off Smeed's escape.

"Let's go back and talk it over," Smeed urged desperately.

He took Pembroke's arm. The man not only jerked free but he slapped Smeed stingingly across the face.

Smeed took the automatic pistol from his belt and crashed it down on the planter's head. Pembroke sagged in a limp heap to the sand. "Maybe that," Smeed said, " 'll teach you to mind your own business."

He supposed the man was only knocked out. Stooping to find out, he rolled Pembroke over on his back and saw a glassy stare in the eyes. His hand at the man's breast could feel no beat there. Pale moonlight filtered through the palms and made eerie shapes on the sand.

Was he dead? How much of a shock would an alcoholic heart like Pembroke's stand? In either case Smeed didn't like it. If the man was dead, then it was murder. If he survived, he'd make a witness more vindictive than ever.

A skiff was pulled up on the beach, close by. Alive or dead, Pembroke must be put out of sight. Smeed picked up the inert form and carried it to the skiff. He got in with it and pushed off into the lagoon. The tide was at ebb. Smeed, his hands hot and sticky on the oars, rowed desperately toward the reef.

He gave his own anchored launch a wide berth.

A kilometer off shore, almost to the reef channel, he let the boat drift. The skiff had an anchor roped to the bow. He cut the rope and then roped the anchor securely to Pembroke. Overside he rolled the man, anchor and all.

Oaring back to the beach, he decided not to risk waiting for that final payment from Vaiala. There'd be a flood tide at dawn, and he must get aboard the *Cecelia* and be gone. At low tide the reef channel was too shallow for a seagoing vessel cargoed deep to her Plimsoll.

Smeed beached the skiff and hurried to the store. He had been gone barely an hour. Now he went to his quarters and packed bags. Most of his valuables, including the store safe, had already gone aboard.

Next he went into the office to pick up the records there. He was tossing them into a sea chest when he became aware of a strange blankness on the walls.

Where was that gallery of women? It was gone. The walls were bare except for four thumb tacks each with a fringe of torn paper around it. That was where Pembroke in his maudlin resentment had snatched away the snapshot of the missionary's daughter.

Now all the rest of the pictures were gone, thumb tacks and all.

The fact made a clammy moisture break out on Smeed's face. That Yank sailor must have been here within the hour and taken them away.

And Smeed recalled a warning from Skipper Amos Pring. "They'll ketch up with you some day, them females will!"

Smeed filled the chest with odds and ends. He assembled his bags. No use going on board till the dawn tide, though. He found a pint of cognac and poured himself a drink.

Another sweltering hour dragged by. From outside came no sound except from a pair of fruit bats quarreling in a mango tree. Lee Mason? What was the fellow's

game, anyway? Smeed recalled his own jeering challenge, "Help yourself," referring to the wall pictures. And Mason's absorbed answer — "Maybe I will."

A TROPIC dawn came with its usual suddenness and Smeed saw that the lagoon was at flood tide. He carried his bags to the skiff, then went back for the chest. Soon he was rowing toward the launch.

Halfway there, he looked over his shoulder and saw a canoe push off from it. Had some native been aboard, looking for him? Then he saw that the occupant of the canoe was a white man. Lee Mason. Mason was now paddling briskly to the beach, taking a course to avoid meeting Smeed.

"Ahoy there!" Smeed hailed him. But Lee didn't answer. He continued on to the beach while Smeed oared fretfully on to the launch. What had been the sailor's errand there? And where had he been at the moment of Pembroke's murder? New fears gripped Smeed. Had Mason, peering from the night, been a witness to the crime?

At the launch Smeed heaved his luggage over the rail. Then he climbed aboard and set the skiff adrift. "Kaiko," he shouted. But no answer came from any of his three roustabout half-castes.

He found them asleep, aft. Booting them awake Smeed bawled, "What was that Yank sailor doin' on board?"

"We didn't see him," they said.

"Well, get the engine started, and look lively. We're uppin' anchor."

They slouched below to the engine and Smeed, his nerves thumping, began looking about for signs of Mason's intrusion. Had the fellow come aboard for sabotage—to cripple the launch in some way? Perhaps to strip spark plugs from the engine? The coughing of a motor below deck reassured Smeed. Soon the engine was humming smoothly.

Two of the roustabouts came on deck and Smeed yelled for them to pull anchor. When the anchor was up, he took the helm himself. The launch swung around and he pointed her for the reef channel. Halfway there one of his men shouted, "A *paopao's* putting out from shore, sir."

Was it Mason coming out again? No, because Smeed now saw that this *paopao* was heading out from the other side of the cove and that it was paddled by a native. The native was signaling for him to heave to. Smeed's first impulse was to keep going. Then he saw that the paddler was an old man, the high chief of Vaiala village.

One old native couldn't hurt him, so Smeed hove the launch to and waited. Soon the *paopao* came alongside. "Here you are, please," the old chief said.

He handed a tin box up to Smeed. In the box Smeed found gold coins and a few pound notes. The total came to fifty pounds, the exact balance due from Vaiala.

"You come back soon?" the old man asked. "You bring iron houses?"

"Right," Smeed promised. "Then you'll be safe from bombs."

Steering out through the reef, he almost laughed. And once he was on the open sea, most of his uneasiness disappeared. He set a course for Port Louis and turned the helm over to one of his men.

Then he searched the ship thoroughly, stem to stern. Lee Mason might have planted a written statement aboard, hoping it would be found and reported by someone at Port Louis. Smeed put in most of the day at it, leaving no crevice of the deck unsearched. Since all cabins had been locked and the hatch battened, no message could be hidden in the cargo. In the end Smeed made quite sure that no clue or message had been planted anywhere aboard.

The sea was smooth and nightfall found the launch halfway to Port Louis. The launch had to make for that port because her fuel would not be sufficient for a more distant destination.

She went gliding on through the tropic night and at daybreak Smeed sighted Port Louis.

More shipping was in the harbor than he had ever seen there before. A destroyer rode at anchor and the wharves seemed alive with marines. Defense activity was evidently booming Port Louis. Authorities here wouldn't have much time, these days, to waste on a strip of coral and sand like Paou Island.

Dropping his own hook, Smeed went immediately ashore. By mid-morning a dealer had contracted for his entire cargo of copra. "Just as soon as I get it ashore and weighed, Whitey," he said, "I'll give you a check."

No less readily Smeed found a buyer for the launch itself. Shipping of all tonnage was in demand. "Your check'll be ready," the buyer promised, "just as soon as the cargo's unloaded so I can take possession."

Smeed paid off his three roustabouts and sent them packing. He wasn't afraid that they'd tell tales, even if they knew anything. All three were wanted at Rarotonga in connection with an old mutiny.

Smeed took all the cash from his safe, stowed it in a bag and registered at a pub ashore. Next he booked passage on a ship leaving tomorrow evening for Suva. At Suva he could change his name and ship out for parts unknown. He could make himself unfindable long before Lee Mason, stranded on Paou, could possibly get the ear of the law.

MORNING came and from the pub window Smeed saw a lighter alongside the *Cecelia*, taking off copra. By noon the launch was completely unloaded. Smeed went to the copra dealer and collected his check. An hour later he collected a second check from the buyer of the launch.

He cashed both checks at the Port Louis bank. When he put the money in his loot bag, along with the thousand guineas he had stripped from the natives at Paou, the bag was bulging. Smeed chuckled. Those suckers on Paou were waiting for bomb shelters that would never come.

Then, checking out at the pub, he bumped into an old acquaintance, Skipper Amos Pring.

"Ahoy, Whitey!" Pring greeted. "Stand by for a drink."

"Thanks. But I haven't time just now, skipper."

Pring asked with a smirk, "Did them wimmin o' yours ever ketch up with you yet, Whitey?"

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Smeed gave a dry grin. "Not yet, skipper." He checked out and hurried with his bag toward the wharf.

On the wharf he engaged a skiff. "Boy, take me out to the *Starling*."

But an intruding voice spoke quietly at Smeed's elbow. "Just a minute, Smeed." Whirling quickly, Smeed lost color when he saw that it was the deputy commissioner of Port Louis. Back of the commissioner stood a constable.

"We're off on a little inspection cruise," the commissioner announced. "And I fancy we'd better take you along, Smeed."

"Where?" Smeed demanded hoarsely.

"To Paou Island."

"What's the idea?"

"Let's see the inside of that bag." The commissioner nodded to the constable, who took Smeed's bag and opened it.

"*M-m-m!* That's a lot o' loose cash for an honest man to pack around! And I'm told you've just booked passage for the Fijis."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Get into the skiff," the officer said firmly.

He and the constable embarked in the skiff with Smeed. "Row out to that launch, the *Cecelia*, boy."

As they neared the *Cecelia* the commissioner said: "When you came in here, Smeed, she was in full cargo. Look at her now, riding high and empty."

Smeed saw that the Plimsoll line was indeed now about three feet above water. And on the wooden side of her, just below the Plimsoll line, he saw lettering.

He knew it couldn't be paint or chalk. The wash of the sea, coming over from Paou, would have erased any such subsurface writing. How then had Lee Mason managed it?

The skiff coasted nearer and Smeed made out the first letter. It was an H, about a foot high and made with twelve brassy dots:

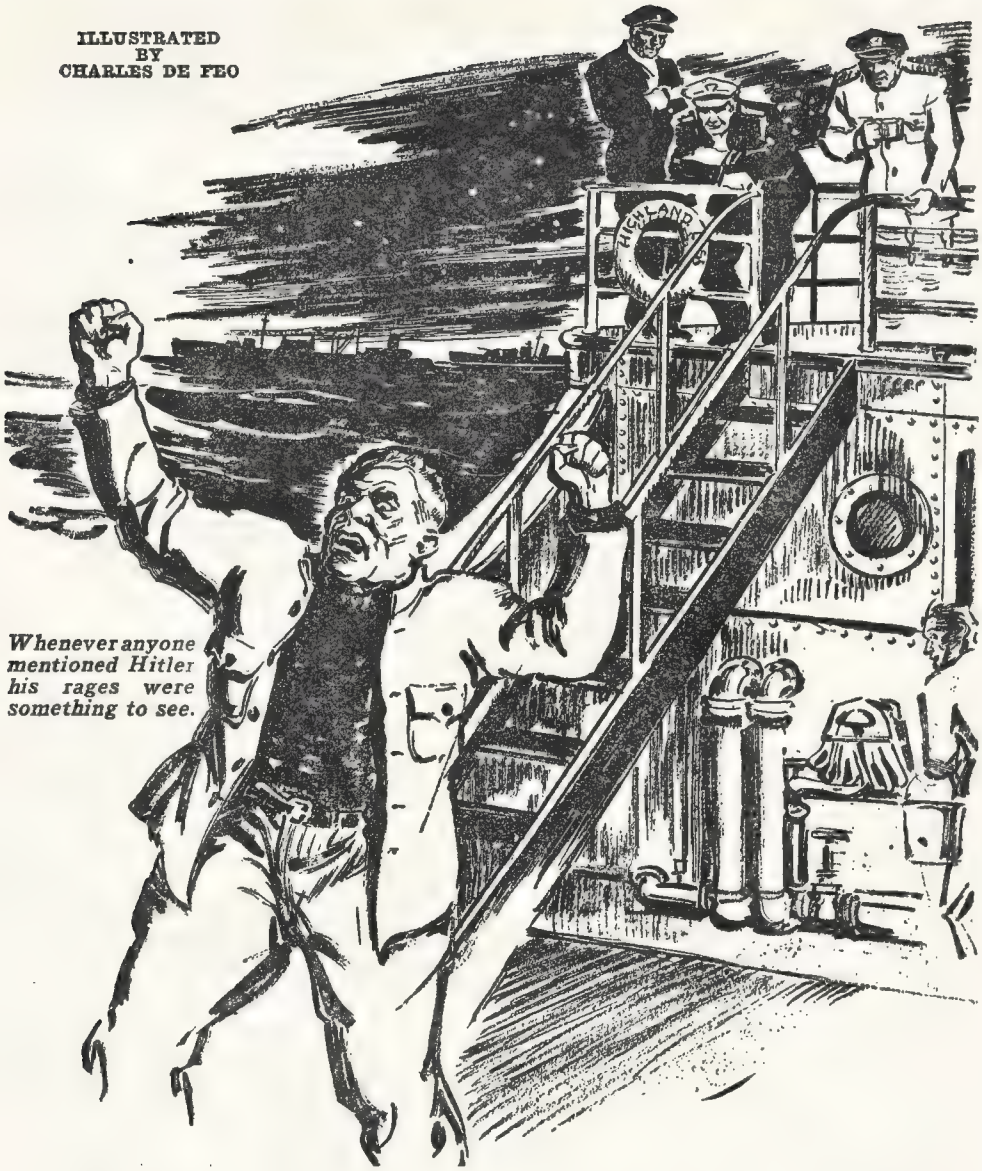
The dots were the heads of thumb tacks which had been pressed into the wood of the ship's side. Sunlight glittered on those brass tack heads and with dismay Smeed realized that it was the unloading of his own loot that had brought them into view. The entire message had twenty-nine letters, so that some three hundred thumb tacks had been needed to make them.

"I wonder where the informer got that many tacks," murmured the commissioner. Then he read aloud the indictment—

HOLD SMEED FOR MURDER
PROOF ON PAOU

"They'll leave yuh grounded on the shoals of grief some day, them wimmin will."

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DE FEO



Whenever anyone mentioned Hitler his rages were something to see.

STAR-GAZER

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

HIS name, he said, was Jon Decker —a good Holland Dutch name— and whenever anyone mentioned Hitler, his rages were something to see. His face would flush, his voice choked, he would forget his slow, precise English and splutter broken words all over the ship's galley.

Often sailors would give the Nazi salute and snap, "Heil Hitler!" just to see him storm about the galley, banging the hell out of pots and pans. It was so

good it could have been an act, and it helped ease the strain of the long days and longer nights when the freighter, *Highland Lass,* was one of the numerous convoyed ships running the submarine blockade to Arctic Russia.

Though he had been torpedoed three times, he insisted no submarine would get him. Nor was it a submarine that finally got him. He would explain that nightly he studied the heavens and cast his horoscope, and that when the stars were unfavorable he laid off a voyage.

"But how about the times your ship went down?" Captain McNaughton asked.

"But *I* survived," he answered. "Besides, allowance must be made for human error in such matters. The stars are never wrong."

He refused to ship on tankers. "I *could* miscast my horoscope," he explained, "and if the tanker was torpedoed, one of my weight couldn't swim fast enough to escape the burning oil spreading over the sea."

He was anxious to make himself popular, hurrying hot coffee to the bridge on raw nights, or when the ship dropped anchor. He would chart the heavens for anyone who was interested, identifying stars and groupings that were strange even to the officers. Then, his voice took on the remoteness common to those who compute distances in light years.

Decker gave Captain McNaughton several books on astronomy, and it was natural enough for the skipper to ask on sailing day, "What do the stars portend on this voyage, Decker?"

"A safe one, sir," the cook answered without hesitation.

Resplendent in white, a genial smile on his round Dutch face, Decker sauntered to the ship's rail and watched the starboard anchor come up. It came slowly, ponderously, the heavy chain links falling into the slots on the wildcat. The chain pipe swallowed them, and down in the locker-room men with steel hooks stacked the chain in tiers—insurance against fouling when the anchor was again dropped.

Decker's eyes moved from the dripping anchor to the stars, then on to McNaughton's grave face. The skipper was star-gazing, thinking, no doubt, of the last convoy. Decker remembered that three steamers had gone down within seven minutes. There had been a leak in spite of sealed orders, and the enemy had waited squarely on the course.

SEVERAL nights later Decker carried coffee to the bridge, duly noted the lookouts and the stars. Those dark shadows against a nearly black night, abeam, ahead and astern, were other freighters maintaining course, speed and position.

While McNaughton cooled his coffee with thoughtful blasts of his breath, Decker lined up the foremast with the head of the bow lookout. When the bow lifted the lookout's head was also in line with a fixed star. He turned to a fixed star abeam, gazing intently.

"An easy way for one of Germany's greatest astronomers and astrologists to fix the ship's position," Decker thought, "and the engines' revolutions per minute reveal the speed. Heil Hitler!"

McNaughton finished his coffee and said, "The same stars are shining over your Holland, Decker. Enough of convoys such as this one, and they'll shine over a free people."

"With God's help, sir," Decker answered sententiously.

An hour later he opened certain lockers in the galley and accumulated sundry items which he hung under his arms and lashed about his waist. He donned a black slicker which neatly covered the items and made his way to the starboard chain-locker ladder.

He descended the iron ladder and unloaded his paraphernalia and assembled it—a compact, but powerful radio transmitter. He tapped a light socket for power. His aerial resembled a steel fishing rod which telescoped when not in use. He removed a loose hull rivet and thrust the rod through the hole, then went back to the set.

Decker squatted down and sent the convoy's general course and approximate position. He was careful to give the *Highland Lass'* position in the convoy. The two previous voyages ships ahead and immediately astern had been torpedoed. That was too close for com-

fort and explained his statement, "allowance must be made for human error."

A second and third time he gave the convoy's position, exactly on the hour, then he removed his equipment, stowed it beneath the chains and turned in.

The following night he again sent the convoy's position, waiting only until it was dark enough to conceal the aerial from watchful eyes on deck. He turned in at nine o'clock, but he got up at twelve and looked at the stars. He swore furiously and hurried to the chain locker. The course had been radically altered. He worked feverishly to set up the transmitter and get off word of the change. He'd give details and positions later.

ON THE bridge, Captain McNaughton was too busy to look at the stars. He wasn't sure whether the shadow dead ahead was land, or an exceptionally dark area of the sea. He only knew the convoy was coming to anchor unexpectedly and the other ships were steaming too close for comfort.

"What caused the change, Captain?" Kelso, the chief officer, asked.

"Shore stations picked up signals from the convoy," McNaughton answered. "Decoders are positive the position was given. We're anchoring until daylight. Land-based bombers want to give the water a going-over, Mr. Kelso."

Destroyers sped about like nervous sheep dogs keeping the flock together and suddenly the signal came to anchor. McNaughton noticed land shadows to port, starboard and ahead. They were in an isolated anchorage.

The ship ahead was backing to avoid a collision with the freighter immediately beyond her. McNaughton had been in the war long enough to realize there were times when a convoy couldn't enter a harbor and drop anchor in a leisurely manner. This was one of them. He rang for full speed astern, then to help check the ship's momentum, ordered both anchors dropped.

Two six-thousand-pound mud-hooks splashed and with increasing speed the heavy chain rattled through the hawse pipes. In the six by eight feet of space in the lockers the chain, snatched from the tiers by three-ton anchors, plus the weight of the chain beyond the hawse pipes, began to lash back and forth—a pliable whip of steel, each fathom of which weighed over five hundred pounds. It clanked and snapped, cutting, slashing and smashing every square foot of air in the lockers until an order from the bridge stopped the run-out.

The hooks dug deep and held.

McNaughton drew a deep, relieved breath as his own command escaped a collision. He listened. All over the harbor, ships were anchoring, then something of peace settled over the convoy. For the moment it was safe. McNaughton looked at the stars. "I wonder where our star-gazing cook is?" he asked. "Chain running through the hawse pipes is usually the signal for him to hurry to the bridge with hot coffee."

"He wasn't expecting us to anchor, sir," the quartermaster said.

McNaughton looked at the heavens again. There were areas that fairly blazed. "It is too bad Decker isn't here," McNaughton said. "I've never seen them more beautiful."

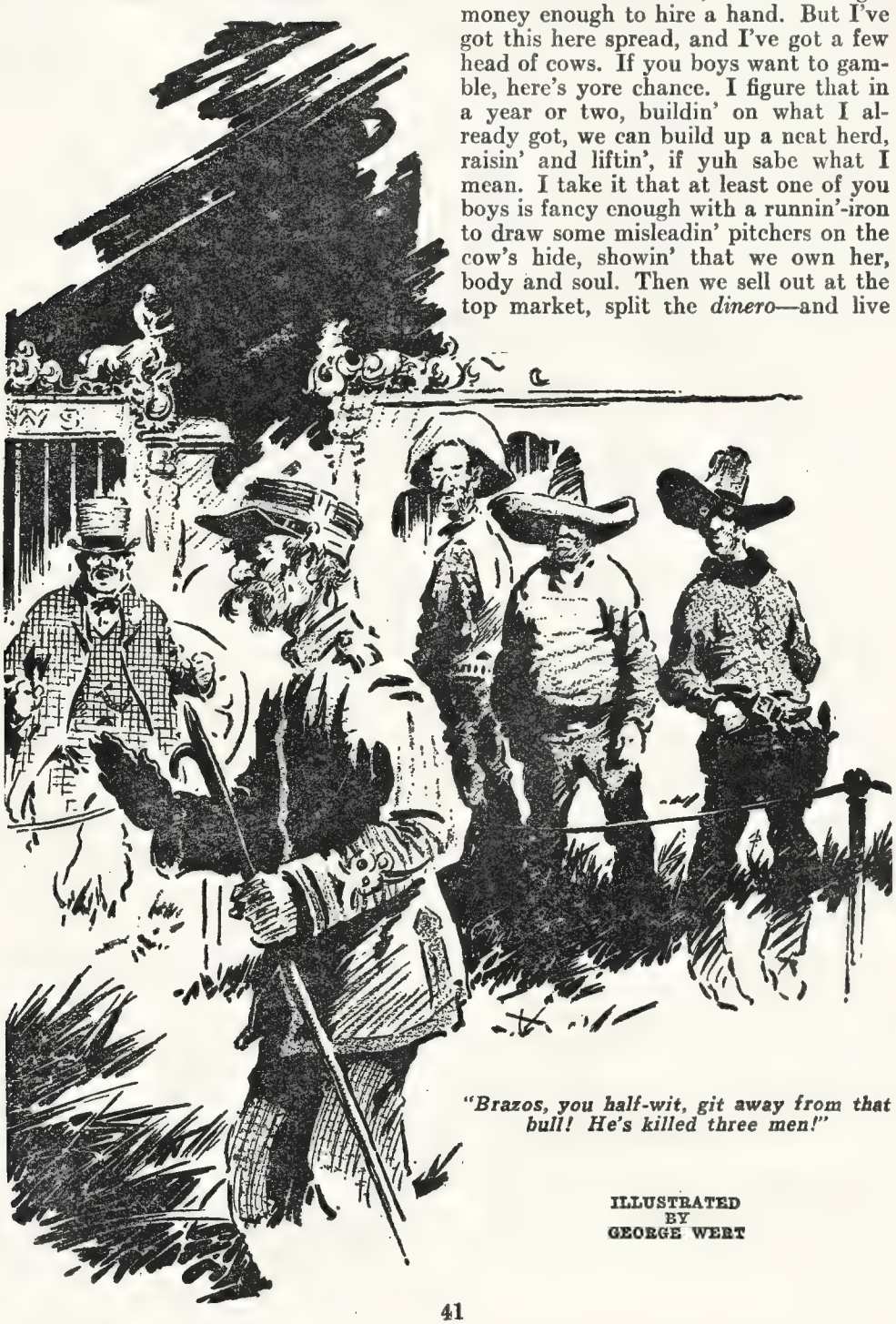
IT'S A TOUGH LIFE

By W. C. TUTTLE

IN THE beginning, as the Bible says, me and Sawtooth Slade, Panamint Peters and Poco Martinez came to Peaceful Valley. I'm Brazos Butler, an upright citizen and right proud of my family tree. Peaceful Valley wasn't exactly in the itinerary of us four, but there was a mightily peeved sheriff only about ten miles behind us. Not only that, but he had advertised his peeve to all other sheriffs in that end of Arizony. When one advertises his peeve, they all try to help him out. I ain't never knowed a more clannish profession.

Like I just said—we came to Peaceful Valley, and there we found one Mojave Myers, an old, cold-jawed rannahan, runnin' a cow ranch. He don't know us—not then—but he makes us welcome. After jawin' a couple days, Ol' Mojave makes this oration to the four of us. He says—

"I like you boys fine. I'm crippled and can't work much, and I ain't got money enough to hire a hand. But I've got this here spread, and I've got a few head of cows. If you boys want to gamble, here's yore chance. I figure that in a year or two, buildin' on what I already got, we can build up a neat herd, raisin' and liftin', if yuh sabe what I mean. I take it that at least one of you boys is fancy enough with a runnin'-iron to draw some misleadin' pitchers on the cow's hide, showin' that we own her, body and soul. Then we sell out at the top market, split the *dinero*—and live



"Brazos, you half-wit, git away from that bull! He's killed three men!"

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BY
GEORGE WERT

happily ever afterwards—or until it's gone. What do yuh say, boys?"

Well, we done it. For two years we worked for bacon and beans, and if I do say it myself, we done right well. For two years Sawtooth Slade kept a tally sheet on possible prices. Every time we annexed a cow, Sawtooth put her down as so and so much. That was fine as frawg-hair, but at the end of two years we had so many figures that not a damn one of us could add her up.

Buyers came in and looked over the herd, but Mojave was a hard man to deal with. One day he went back to town with a buyer—and that was the last we seen of Mojave Myers. He sold out and high-tailed it for parts unknown, leavin' us holdin' the sack. Then we found out that Mojave didn't own the ranch a-tall—and he was three months behind in his rent. So we tied on our war-sacks and went over the hill, lean and ga'nt, also plenty disappointed.

Like Panamint said: "Work hard for two years—not even playin' a hand of poker, nor lookin' upon the wine when it was red—and look what happened! If I ever meet Ol' Mojave Myers, he won't even look invitin' to an undertaker."

"Sure," agrees Poco. "I weel keel heem right in hees face, eef they hang you nex' wick—I hope."

WELL, we went a long ways from there. For a couple years we work from place to place, but we finally-like come to Jingle-Bob City, which ain't no me-tropolis, but a fair to middlin' cowtown. The main street is kinda crooked and the sidewalk is one of them high-low sort, made of planks, and the fronts of the houses on Main Street look like they was kinda startin' to make, or jist recoverin' from a bow.

Sawtooth points at the side of a buildin' and says, "A circus comin', boys; and I ain't seen one for twenty years!" We pulls up our broncs and spells out the words: *Myers' mastodonic marvels of jungle life and one ring circus.*

"Myers!" snorts Panamint. "Myers!"

"Aw," says Sawtooth, "what's in a name?"

Well, we tied our broncs in front of the Two-Spot Saloon, where a tall, hairy pilgrim meets us and kinda looks us over careful-like. He says, "Gents, I'm Scissorbill Sweeney, the sheriff around these parts."

I says to him, "Mr. Sheriff, is that a introduction or a warnin'?"

"Well," says he, "it has cost several fellers plenty to answer that there question wrong. We are a peace-lovin' community. At times we gets hilarious with mirth. At other times we gets moody and don't care for disturbances from the outside. Especially with strangers, we is careful and courteous. That's why I introduces myself. Anythin' else you'd like to make guesses about, gents?"

Panamint says, "This yere circus, f'r-instance, Sheriff?"

"Is in our fair city," says the sheriff. "We are a heap partial to circuses, the same havin' been a plumb scarcity around here for years. Even at my age, I hankers for to see a mastodonic marvel of jungle life."

"We'll stay and take her in," says Panamint.

"Decorous-like," advises the sheriff.

"Oh, shore," says Sawtooth. "Have you got a church in this town?"

"Kinda," replies the sheriff. "She's out quite a piece from town. I'll point her out to yuh, if yuh wish."

"Oh, no," says Sawtooth. "If she's quite a piece out. We don't stray much. We jist didn't want to git into one by mistake."

"That," says Scissorbill Sweeney, "is what I calls real piety."

"The church," says Panamint, "will prob'ly be glad."

Well, like I told yuh, we ain't been among the flesh-pots for quite a while; so we make up for lost time. We don't show pride in our capacity, but we do show a little respect; so when I seen the lady on the Green River poster tear off her wings, pull some feathers out of the Old Crow and start doin' a fan-dance on a rafter, I decided it was time for us to git some supper.

The four of us went over to the Roundup Hotel and found our way into the restaurant. Poco Martinez was the only one that fell down durin' the trip.

He can't stand much. He's awful bow-legged, anyway, and whiskey allus makes his knees weak. They bend sideways.

Well, we got planted at a table, and we're lookin' around, kinda owl-eyed, when all to once Panamint lets out sort of a strangled whoop, and kicks me under the table.

"Brazos," he says, "look where I'm lookin'!"

I says, "Hol' still, so I can git m' bearin's."

Then Poco says, "*Madre de Dios!* Eef your eyes are not fooling us, I am a liar, and that ees all I hope."

ON the other side of the dinin' room, settin' at a table, with a fat woman, is Ol' Mojave Myers, all dressed up. Man, he's got on a suit that would scare a Brahma bull—and they ain't scared of man nor devil. Well, we jist sets there, gawpin' at him. Then Poco gets up, cuffs his knees into shape, and starts for that table, with the rest of us trailin' him. Ol' Mojave's mouth opens and shuts, like a fish out of water.

The woman says, "Hannibal, who are these specimens?"

"Hannibal?" queries Panamint. "My Gawd!"

"Well, do you know them, Hannibal?" asks the woman, glarin' at us.

Ol' Mojave chokes, rubs his hands across his eyes and says, "Why, my dear, I—uh—I never—hu-u-u-uh!"

Poco puts his hands on the table and looks at Ol' Mojave.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he grunts. "Thees ees the beegest moments in your life, eef I can believe my eye. Always I am saying that eef you ever see me again there ees notheeng to stop you, eef w'at I am theenking ees true—I hope—or else, I theenk."

"And that," said Sawtooth, "is the whole thing in a nut-shell."

Well, I reckon Ol' Mojave is a heap embarrassed. He don't know what to say. His eyes kinda water, and his chin wiggles. He ain't packin' no gun—not in sight—and we're four to one—if yuh don't count the fat lady.

She says, "If you don't git away from here, I'm going to call for the police."

"Police in Jingle-Bob City?" I asks.

"No, no," chokes Ol' Mojave. "No police, my dear. There's—uh—been a mistake. If you—uh—if you'll go upstairs—"

She gets up, kinda slow-like, and says, "Hannibal, I hope you can explain this—when you come upstairs."

"I—I hope so, my dear, he says.

After she's gone, Ol' Mojave sinks back in his chair and says, "I hope there ain't no hard feelin's, boys."

"None," says Sawtooth. "It's past that, Mojave. We'll all walk out a mile from town, where we'll shoot yuh full of holes, and then come back, quiet-like. No use makin' a specktickle out of a simple thing like that."

"I am asking for the firs' shot," said Poco.

"We'll match for it," declared Panamint.

"I—I jist ain't worth shootin'," protests Mojave.

"We'll stand the expense," says Sawtooth. "It'll be a pleasure to squander about six forty-fives on yuh, Mojave. Shall we start now?"

"Wait a minute!" snorts Panamint. "Myers! Mastodon Marvels—Mojave, you don't happen to be—or do yuh?"

Ol' Mojave sighs deep-like and nods his head.

"I do," he said. "I own the circus. That is, me and my wife."

"I'll be a horned toad's husband!" snorts Sawtooth. "You!"

"Me, Sawtooth," admits Mojave. "Hannibal Harrison Myers. I bought it out a month after I left Peaceful Valley. I—I done you boys dirt."

"We figgered that'n out ourselves," I told him. "But the day of reckonin' is at hand, Mojave. It won't hardly pay us for two years hard work, but we'll feel better about it."

"Ain't there no way to fix this up?" asks Mojave kinda sad-like.

"Kinda thisaway," suggests Sawtooth. "We worked two years per each. At forty a month per each, that makes yuh owe each of us nine hundred and sixty dollars. Then yuh must remember that yuh owe us somethin' for doin' what yuh done. Make it a couple thousand each."

"Couple thousand apiece? Eight thousand dollars!"

"I'm radder keel heem," says Poco.

The trouble with Poco is that he can't imagine more 'n forty dollars all in one chunk. When it gets over that—he's stuck. I says, "We'll settle for two thousand apiece, Mojave."

"An' I can't keel heem?" asked Poco.

"Eight thousand dollars," says Ol' Mojave, now Hannibal. "Boys, the whole Myers circus ain't worth that much. That is, I can't sell it. You'll have to wait for yore money."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggests Sawtooth. "Mojave, jist what do yuh figure this here circus is worth?"

"Maybe five thousand dollars," says Mojave sad-like.

"All right," says Sawtooth, "we'll take the circus, and you can owe us the other three thousand."

"My Gawd!" breathes Mojave. "You leave me broke and in debt. I'll buy a drink, and we can ponder this proposition."

WELL, we went back to the Two-Spot Saloon with Mojave, where he's generous with his buyin', I'll say that for him. Things begin to fog up a little. In fact, they fogs so bad-like that when Panamint says, "All in favor of the proposition say aye," I can't even gulp.

Somebody gives me a piece of paper. I thought it was a check for two thousand dollars, until Ol' Mojave says to me, "Brazos, you should be proud; you've got a mortgage on one of the oldest African lions in the world. He'll eat a horse at one setting."

That's fine. He don't say how often that lion got set, but if it's only once a day it's hefty eatin'. After while I runs into Poco, and he says, "Leesten, Brazos, w'at in the hell ees a morts-gage?"

I says, "I don't know, but I've got one on a lion."

"Panamint," says Poco, "say eet ees a geeft on papers W'at the hell I am goin' for do weeth a camels ees more than you can understand."

"That's right," says I. "Let's see if we can do any business with the bartender."

The bartender says, "A mortgage on a lion for a quart of tequila? Yours is an interestin' case. Mostly it's pink elephants. Thank yuh kindly, but my menageries are all of the past, stranger. I don't drink it no more—I just sell it."

"I geeve you morts-gage from a camel," offered Poco.

"Yuh would? That's queer, now ain't it? If them other two hairy specimens I seen yuh with today should happen to have mortgages on a elephant and a zeeber, yuh could have yore own parade. That'd be fun."

"W'at ees a parade?" asks Poco.

Can yuh imagine a feller as dumb as that? Poco must be forty and he's askin' a question like that. Well, the bartender exp'ained what it was, and it sounds interestin'. It don't cost nothin', and all yuh do is stand on the street and watch it go past. Well, I bought us each a quart of tequila, and then me and Poco went down where the circus is gettin' ready.

Lots of people down there, and I reckon it's awful excitin', watchin' a circus gettin' ready, but we don't pay much attention. Tequila does that to yuh. Our biggest job was to keep out of ropes and not walk into things. We found Panamint, Sawtooth and a big Swede, settin' in the shade. Panamint says, "Julius, I want to make yuh used to Brazos. He has a mortgage on the lion."

Julius accepted the tequila, lowered it about two inches, and says, "Ay am Yulius de animal man. Ay also double in brass and Ay also play de call-i-o-pee a little."

"That's all right," says I, "we all have our failin's. But tell me somethin' about that there lion of mine."

"De lion," says Julius, "is named Yudas. He vill eat off your hand."

"At one settin'?" I asks.

"He is not a set-ter," declared Julius, "he is a Noo-bian."

"Julius," says I, "how long since you herded sheep?"

Julius grins like a danged fool and says, "Das is fonny visky. Ven it goes down it taste like per-fumery, but by jimminy, all to vonce you don't give damn from nothing."

"I think you was borned that way," says Sawtooth. "Let's go look at what we've got on paper."

Well, we finished up that tequila, and went wanderin' around. We found the animals in a tent, but there's a couple fellers in there with pitch-forks and they hazed us out; so we went back uptown. Everybody in Jingle-Bob City and the surroundin' country are in town for the parade. I never seen so many men, women, kids and dogs in my life.

Me and Poco got on the top-pole of the hitch-rack in front of the Two-Spot Saloon, which put us kinda above them on the sidewalk. Scissorbill Sweeney, the sheriff, comes along and looks us over, but don't say nothin'. That rack is full of saddle horses, and I never seen more snake-headed, rattler-eye broncs in my life. One of 'em tried to eat the top off my boot, but I kicked him loose.

Then some music started down the street, and everybody yells, "Here comes the parade!"

EVERY one of them broncs commences to fidgit and shuffle. In front was Mojave Myers and his fat wife in a little buggy and two white horses. Old Mojave is wearin' a shiny high hat and he's up there bowin' and grinnin' all over the place. I've allus been a peaceable person, full of the milk of human kindness, and wantin' to be a brother to all men, but jist the sight of that old double-crossin' side-winder made me forget that we were brothers under the skin. He sees me and Poco on that top-pole of the hitch-rack, and he lifts that shiny hat jist a little higher.

Pardner, he lost that hat. I socked a forty-five jist about the sweatband, and that danged plug-hat sailed plumb into the crowd on the other side of the street. Mebbe I done wrong, but I wasn't sure just then. When I went over backwards off that hitch-rack, and Scissorbill Sweeney, the sheriff, landed on me, I was sure I'd done wrong. It don't take so awful much for me to make up my mind about anythin'.

Well, he yanks me up to my feet and he says, "I've been a-watchin' of you, and I seen what yuh done. Like I told yuh before, we aims to enjoy this here circus; so yo're goin' to jail and let us enjoy it."

I says, "By that time, Sheriff, the parade will be over."

"Yeah, yo're right," he says. "It's shore on the move. Well, me and you are goin' to stand right here, until she's done passed, and if yuh even make one pe-culiar break, I'll shoot yuh full of bullets."

Well, that was all very nice and considerate. There's about sixteen wild broncs tied to that hitch-rack, and they don't sabe circuses. Out of a cloud of dust cometh that big elephant, and I don't mind tellin' yuh that hell let loose for recess. Sixteen scared broncs uprooted that hitch-rack, and each bronc had a different destination in mind.

The worst of it was—Scissorbill Sweeney had handcuffed us together. Me and Scissorbill had almost as many different destinations as them sixteen broncs. Scissorbill is a lot bigger'n me, and this is one time I've got to cooperate with the law. We was gettin' along fine, until an elephant came between us.

There's lots of things that can come between good friends, like me and Scissorbill Sweeney, but nothin' with the authority of a elephant. Them things must be awful strong, don'tcha know it? I had both arms around Scissorbill, but the elephant took him right away from me, with me gently danglin' from Scissorbill, and the next thing I knowed it was a dead-heat between me and Scissorbill to see which one went through the big window of the Two-Spot Saloon first. The bartender says he thinks that the seat of my pants hit the window first. *Quien sabe?*

Anyway, we ended up under the pool-table at the far end of the room, together with a couple chairs, a table and several cuspidors. It takes a lot to discourage one of the Butlers from Brazos. I got the key from Scissorbill's pocket and unlocked the handcuff, after which I hooked him up to a table and a chair.

I'm shore skun up quite a bit, squeak a little, and my left leg acts like it was at a dance, but I got outside in time to see the tail-end of the parade. I've also got Scissorbill's gun, and a hankerin' to

meet that there elephant in a square fight. Yuh can't do much with a sheriff hangin' to yore wrist.

Out on the street I runs into Panamint, Sawtooth and Poco. Sawtooth says, "Poco's the biggest liar I ever heard. He said you was handcuffed to the sheriff and that the elephant throwed yuh both through the winder of the Two-Spot. No man could stand that—and still live."

"No, he shore couldn't," says I, "but I'm either alive or the preachers have got to change their ideas of Heaven. When do we git some money from Mojave Myers?"

"That's it," sighs Sawtooth. "We took our mortgages to a lawyer, and he says they ain't no good."

"No good?" I says. "What's wrong with 'em?"

I got mine out and it looked all right. It says, "This mortgage is worth one lion."

It was signed by H. H. Myers.

"Mine's worth a elephant," says Sawtooth, "and I aim to have a elephant."

"All my life," says Panamint, "I've hankered for a zeeber. As far back as I can remember, I've wanted a penitentiary jackass. It's kinda growed onto me, and I ain't givin' up without a struggle."

"I tak' a camel, I hope," said Poco.

"I ain't never owned no lion," I told them. "Fact is, I ain't never had no yearnin' thataway—until jist now. It's jist kinda come over me all to once that life won't be worth while, unless I've got a lion."

WELL, it was dark, and the circus was due to start; so we went down there. I seen Scissorbill, talkin' with Mojave Myers, so I wandered down between some tents, where I fell over more damn guy-ropes. I saw a husky-lookin feller, peekin' through a hole in a tent; so I kicked him in the seat of the pants, and I says, "You ort to be ashamed of yourself." He had a hand like a ham, but I had Scissorbill's gun; so he went gallopin' away, yellin' somethin' about me bein' a rube.

Well, I ain't normally curious, but I jist kinda wondered what he was lookin' at in there. I found out. A ball hit me between the eyes, and I almost lost my presence of mind. I went on my hands and knees plumb around that tent, wonderin' what to do next, when somebody lifted up the bottom of the tent right in my face.

I says, "Much obliged, pardner," and crawled right in. Then somebody picked me right up and stood me on my feet. I can still see a little. In fact, I seen too damn much. I'm leanin' right up agin the left front leg of that damn elephant!

"Leave that elephant alone, Brazos," says Sawtooth's voice, "yours is the lion."

I looked around and there's Sawtooth, Panamint and Poco, all standin' behind a rope, lookin' at me. The elephant flung his trunk over my shoulder and started foolin' with my belt-buckle. I took both hands and tried to shove it away. Then I hears a voice say, "Yudas Priest, what are you doin' vit that bull? Get avay from him!"

I says, "Does this here elephant understand you?"

He says, "Yah, su-u-ure, he onderstand me all right."

"Well," says I, "you talk to him, I'm too damn scared to sabe what yuh mean."

Pop! My belt busted right at the buckle, and that six-gun fell right on a bunion I've been nursin' for weeks. Then that damn elephant gathers up a fold of my shirt, and I'm shucked jist like a ear of corn. I never came out of a shirt so quick in my life. Panamint says, "I've allus liked yore saddle, Brazos, and if you ain't got nobody else in mind to leave it to—well, you know how it is."

By this time there's quite a crowd gathered, and that danged Swede is tellin' me what that elephant might do to me if I don't quit foolin' with him. *Me* foolin' with *him!* Somebody's done called Mojave Myers, and he shoves through the crowd. He yells, "Brazos, you halfwit, git away from that bull! He's killed three men!"

And every time I try to move, that elephant drags me back. I says, "Sawtooth, you've got a mortgage on this

hunk of loose hide, and if you don't make him let me loose, I won't be responsible."

That elephant ran that cold end of his trunk up and down my vertebray, like he was tryin' to play a tune on my backbone.

"Ay t'ank he likes you," said the Swede.

Just then the elephant felt around and got holt of the top of my pants. I remembered what happened to my shirt —and there's a couple ladies in the audience. I had the toe of my right boot on top of that six-shooter, and all to once I dropped down, got that gun in my fist and rolled to one side, before that danged elephant can find me. I couldn't miss. All I had to do was fan the hammer and let nature take her course. Man, that elephant whirled around and let out a blast that would have drowned out any whistle on earth. My last bullet hit him right square in the slack of his pants and then I grabbed him by the tail.

If yuh ever have a chance to grab a scared elephant by the tail—don't do it. Jist stand back, keep your hands behind yuh and say, "I ain't goin' to grab it!" It ain't often that Brazos Butler offers advice, but this comes straight from the heart. Well, we went around in a circle a couple times, with me hangin' straight out like the tail on a kite, and then we started goin'.

We hit that lion cage dead center, and then we hit everythin' else in reach. We knocked down tent-poles, upset wagons, and all to once we went out through the side of that tent, with people screamin' and shootin' behind us, when we hit the open spaces.

There's a million square miles of open country out there, but that elephant had to hit for the center of Jingle-Bob City, with me sailin' wide and free. I thinks to myself, "If I can only see Sawtooth, mebbe I can trade my lion for his elephant, because I ain't never goin' to have time to come back for no lion."

I dunno why I never thought to let loose. Just then we went through a back yard, picked up the week's washin', lines and all, busted the front fence and went down the main street, with flags flyin'. I can still hear folks yellin' and shootin' behind us. I tried to look back, and just then that crazy elephant made a quick right-hand turn, leaving me hangin' straight out and goin' sideways, and then I hit the side of that livery-stable doorway.

I WASN'T quite out, but I shore was down, and one side of me felt awful flat. But I staggered inside that stable, lookin' for a soft spot on which to lay the old carcass. If I can get up in that hay-loft, I'll be all right. Soft hay appealed to me, and I also wanted to be at least one story higher than that crowd which is comin' down the street. Folks in Jingle-Bob City might resent havin' their circus busted up thataway.

I got me a rope, which was hangin' near the ladder, and managed to get up there. I kinda feel lost if I ain't got no rope. I've lost that gun, and I've been banged around so much that I ain't got no feelin' in any part of me, except my

head and my left arm. A Butler from the Brazos never quits, and with only a head and a left arm, I'm a match for anythin'.

I sprawled on the hay and listened to the crowd around the stable. Above all the rest, I can hear Mojave Myers' voice complainin', "I demand their immediate arrest, Sheriff. They stole my elephant, lion, zebra and camel. They're worth a fortune, I tell yuh. Without them animals, I'm a ruined man."

"Are yuh shore they're here?" asked Scissorbill Sweeney.

"I think so. The lion was ahead, when they left the grounds. One of them was ridin' the zebra, and the other one had the camel on a rope. It was a dastardly attempt to steal my menagerie. Shut the door and post a guard, before they get out again."

I never stole that elephant. I shot to save my life, and then I don't know exactly why I grabbed that tail. If yuh come right down to it, I've got a case against the elephant.

"Yuh can't shut no door when there ain't no door," says Scissorbill, "and I don't know of anybody that wants to stand in front of that hole. I know danged well, I don't."

While they're arguin' down there, I hears a whisperin' voice sayin', "Brazos, is that you up here?"

It sounds like Sawtooth Slade, with all the strings busted, except the E.

I says, "Sawtooth, are you alone?"

"No," he says, awful weak-like, "but I wish I was."

"Who's with yuh?" I whispers.

"I don't know his name," says Sawtooth, "but yore mortgage covers him."

"You mean, you've got *my* lion?" I asks.

"I ain't exactly *got* him," says Sawtooth, "but he ain't gone down since I came up."

"Which of yuh came up first?" I asks.

"If you could see the seat of my pants," says Sawtooth, sad-like, "you wouldn't have to ask, Brazos."

"Where's Panamint?" I asks.

"I dunno. The last I seen of him he was on that zebra, and headin' awful fast for the front door of the Two-Spot Saloon."

Then we hears Scissorbill Sweeney announce, "When we gets 'em, we'll have the finest public lynchin' ever seen in Jingle-Bob."

"I want my animals first," declares Mojave Myers, "but I'll stay for the lynchin'."

I says, "Sawtooth, have yuh got a gun?"

"If I had," says Sawtooth, "no damn lion could claw the seat out of my pants, and then make me talk in whispers."

"You don't know that lion's name, do yuh?" I asks.

"What do yuh want to do—call him?" asks Sawtooth. "My Gawd, ain't you had trouble enough?"

"We might sing," I suggests. "They say that music soothes 'em."

"With a lion among us and a lynch-lawyer down below—you want to sing."

I didn't want to sing—it was jist an idea. I peeked over the pile of hay and I can see the outline of the hay-hole at the end of the loft. The hole is about four feet square, and it's about fifteen feet from the ground—but what's fifteen feet in a case like this. When I started out, I had a mortgage on a lion in my shirt pocket, but now I ain't even got a shirt.

I says, "Sawtooth, they'll be up here in a minute. If we can make that hay-hole and hit the street, mebbe we can save two necks out of the four we started out with."

"The trouble is," complains Sawtooth, "ever' time I move, the lion growls. I'm jist scared that I'm settin' on some part of him. Listen!"

I hears Sawtooth move, and then a weak voice says, "*Madre de Dios,* sometheeng br'ak my weesh-bones!"

"Well Gawd, I'm a-settin' on Poco!" gasps Sawtooth.

"Well, where's the lion?" I asks.

"He's up here," says Sawtooth. "I know he ain't been down since I got here, and he was awful close to me."

THE gang downstairs are sure havin' a time. Judgin' from the talkin', they've got the elephant in the big corral behind the stable, but they can't make him behave.

Mojave Myers yells, "Don't try to rope him! My Gawd, yuh couldn't hold him with a cable. Somebody find Julius! Get Julius! He can calm him."

"What did you do with the camel, Poco?" asks Sawtooth.

"Those damn theeng!" wailed Poco in the dark. "I get heem up to the saloon and I try to tie heem to a post. I say to heem, 'Leesten, Meester Humpsback—' and then he speet right in my face. *Dios mio!* And then he chase me all the way down here."

"Never mind the camel," says I. "I want to know where-at is that damn lion named Judas."

Scissorbill is sayin', "It's a cinch they're up in the hay-loft—and that sawed-off Brazos has got my six-gun. Mebbe there's more of 'em with guns. Our best bet is to surround the place and starve 'em out."

"But my animals!" wails Mojave Myers. "The only thing we've located is the elephant. I'm still shy a lion, a zebra and a camel."

"Yore lion," says Scissorbill, "is prob'ly miles away by now."

Just then the lion opened his mouth and made a noise like fourteen men with wooden teeth, all yellin' at the same time from the bottom of a iron tank. I bounced on that hay and went almost to the rafters, and when I hit the boards I was halfway to that hay-hole.

Just then I heard somebody scream downstairs, "Lo-o-o-ok out! Here he comes!"

I thought they meant me; so I skidded to a stop, right at the hole. But I reckon they meant the elephant. I heard doors flyin' and people yellin', and I looked back. Mebbe that lion thought I was cuttin' off his one way of gettin' away, and was goin' to beat me to the hay-hole. I'm bow-legged and numb to my waist; so there wasn't no chance for me to step aside. It was whole-hog or nothin', as far as I was concerned, and that lion dived right between my legs. That is, he went through, until my legs kinda bound on him, and then I went with the lion.

I reckon it was the elephant that was comin' back, because we landed right among the crowd. I was kinda stunned,

That lion dived right between my legs.

but I stuck to the lion, while folks fell over me, yellin', "Look out for the elephant! Look out! He's comin'!"

But Brazos Butler knows what he's doin'. I've still got that rope, and I sure looped it around his neck. I says to him, "Even if I ain't got no mortgage, p'session is nine points in the law."

Man, that lion is awful heavy and awful stubborn, but I took him along. I seen that elephant knock all the props out from under the porch at the Two-Spot Saloon. I almost fell over somethin' in the street, and there's enough light for me to see that it's Panamint, settin' on the neck of that zeeber. I says, "Panamint, this is Brazos."

"The hell it is!" says he. "We went faster'n I thought. And we're goin' agin, as soon as I can git m' wind, stranger."

"Don'tcha remember me?" I asks. "Brazos Butler."

"That must have been before my time," he says. "Glad to meetcha."

"Ain't you Panamint Peters?" I asks.

"Nope. Name has a familiar ring. Prob'ly somebody I read about. Where are you goin', stranger?"

"I'm leadin' m' lion," I says. "I've got a good one, too."

"Well, well!" says he. "So that's yore business. Anythin' in it?"

"Oh, we kinda scratch along," says I.

Yuh know, it didn't seem like me talkin'. I can hear it, but that's all. The Two-Spot Saloon is a wreck, but it's full of folks, all talkin' at once. I scrooged m' way through the busted porch and got inside. I never seen so many cripples in my life. They've got Scissorbill Sweeney on top of the bar and they're tryin' to make him bend in the middle. But every time they make it he flops right back. I've still got my rope, but the lion is outside.

SUDDEN-LIKE there's an awful crash, and Panamint come through the only unbusted window in the saloon. He lands settin' down and just stays there. Sawtooth and Poco crawls in through the busted window, and just stand there, minus ninety percent of their clothes.

I manages to shake my eyeballs into line and I seen Mrs. Mojave Myers, dressed in what's left of her black dress, her hat hangin' to the back of her head. She yells, "Listen t' me, you savages! You ain't going to lynch anybody. My husband told me the whole story after the parade. He done them three fellers a dirty trick. By rights, the whole circus belongs to them. They can have it!"

I heard two loud clumps, and looked around. Sawtooth and Poco have fainted, and Panamint is startin' to crawl back outside. The crowd has kinda quieted down. Scissorbill sets up and says, "What the hell you got on the other end of that rope?"

"I've got my lion," I says.

Then I started haulin' on that rope. Man, I never knowed that so many folks was scared of a lion, and I never seen cripples git cured so quick. They went out of there in two shakes, and there ain't nobody left but me and Mrs. Myers, Panamint, Sawtooth and Poco. Mrs. Myers says, "You—you've got that lion on a—a rope?"

I says, "Ma'am, you stand right there and I'll prove it!"

She didn't. For a fat woman, she's shore agile. She hit a corner of the pool-table, rickershayed against the wall, and sat down flat, her hat over both eyes, where she wails, "Leggo that rope! Leggo that rope!" in a very weak voice.

I says, "Ma'am, it's a point of honor with me. I don't want even no part of yore damn circus, but I'm goin' to prove I *could* have a lion, if I wanted one."

Well, I dug my heels in hard and started haulin' again. That lion didn't want to come in, but I wasn't to be stopped. I hauled him right through that busted doorway. When he hit that slick floor he went so fast that I slipped and hit my head against the bar. Mebbe I was comatose for a moment, I dunno. Then I hears Mrs. Myers screamin', "Hannibal! Hannibal! My Gawd, what have they done to you? Haulin' you around on the end of a rope."

I hung onto that bar and tried to get my eyes focused. There's Mrs. Myers on her knees beside Mojave, and I'm still hangin' onto the rope around his shoulders and neck. Somethin' brushed against my knee, and I reached down to feel what it is. It's got long hair, and I can hear it breathe.

Panamint says, "You—you better git —away from—that, Brazos."

I says, "Yeah—I—better."

It's Judas. He shoves a little harder, and I try to think of a prayer, but all I can think of is, "Now I lay me down to sleep." That'd be a fine thing to do. The upper half of me is already runnin' at top speed, but the lower half can't even move an inch.

Just then that long, lean Swede crawls through the busted doorway. He says, "Oh, dere you are, Yudas!"

He comes over to us and he says, "Ay don't remamber you, but Ay yust vant to tell you that you are all t'rough fooling around vit Yudas. He is old faller and he need rest. Come, Yudas."

Then that danged Swede takes the lion by the scruff of the neck, and they walk out together. Neither of 'em even look back. Then me and Sawtooth and Panamint and Poco walk out. We don't look back either. I should have. A bottle hit me on the head, and the boys had to tie me to my saddle for the first ten miles. I suspect Mrs. Myers. But that's all right. She's got to live with Ol' Mojave, and look what they've got to contend with. It's a tough life.

TANKER CREW

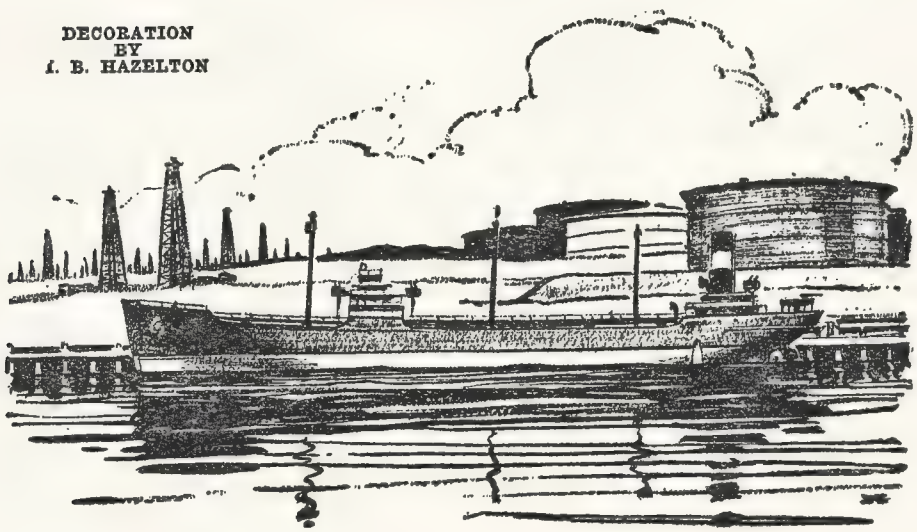
By ROBERT D. ABRAHAMS

When we come rolling into port, there's never a band to play;
No braided admiral calls our names in the day's communiqué,
Or sends us out to tell the crowds the reason we act that way,
Or pins us medals on our shirts,
Or teams us up with social skirts—
We're just the gang that carries the oil
And thank you when you let us ashore to spend our bonus pay

And often enough we don't come back, we stay at sea instead.
And snooze an everlasting snooze in a salty, unmade bed,
With never a mark above the place, and never a stone at head.
We're just a tanker, unescorted,
A medium tanker, unreported,
Sunk while trying to carry the oil,
And we thank you kindly who gave us the chance to earn our daily bread.

But we tanker men, we don't complain, we're ready to sail tonight.
Just give us a ship to get us there and a skipper who treats us right.
We'll sail your vessel to hell and back with never a showing light,
We'll skip the medals, skip the braid,
We won't pretend we're never afraid
But we're going ahead to carry the oil,
The highly necessary oil,
You bet we're going to carry the oil,
And show 'em the way an American gang puts up an American fight.

DECORATION
BY
I. B. HAZELTON



NO SURRENDER

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Several hands clutched at him, there was a moment of confusion.

MOHAMMED ben Rekabi was an old soldier. During his three years' enlistment in the Moroccan *Tirailleurs* he had fought against the tribes of the mountains, for the French. That had been proper, for under the sultans his own father, his grandfather, and those before him had gone into the hills on military expeditions. After that, back in civilian life, Mohammed had lived in Meknes, doing odd jobs for a French garage-keeper.

That had lasted a couple of years, then he had been informed that reservists were called to the colors. By that time, he had acquired a wife and a *muchachou,* but he did not need to worry, the government would take care of them. He had slid his big feet once more into military boots, had worn the khaki uniform, carried pack and rifle. This time, it had been more interesting. He had crossed the sea, gone to France.

There had been good fighting from the beginning. The Moroccans were honored by being placed in the front lines. Mohammed had but a vague idea of what the Maginot Line, of which the French officers and noncoms spoke often, could be. Something awing, formidable. Then no one had mentioned it anymore, and he had been marched, with his whole battalion, for several days.

And it was after that that his great experience, the mine of anecdotes and stories that would supply him for life, had started—the most glorious series of fights that even a Moroccan could dream of. Mohammed had been subjected, with his thousands of comrades, to artillery fire, to the attacks of tanks and dive bombers, to flame throwers and grenades. It had been a glorious period, when he had snatched his food at random, slept in ditches, barns, cellars. He knew

that he had killed many Boches, for at times one could not miss them, as they came in solid waves, singing and shouting.

While attacking a tank, with grenades, and trying to roll his missiles underneath, as instructed by his lieutenant, Marechal, he had been struck by a bullet, through the leg. And by a small shell fragment, on the head. So that for several days he had lost clear memory of events, and in fact had not asked many questions until he had got back to Morocco, to convalesce in a hospital.

THE WAR was lost by the French, he was told; the Boche was master. He had lighted a cigarette, nodded. It was not his fault, he had obeyed orders, fired his rifle as accurately as he could. He was a philosopher, like all his kind. The Master of the Hour was the Master. He had gone on a visit to Meknes then, and discovered that as he had been reported dead, his wife was remarried.

There was no legal complication, as he had not married according to French law. He had nothing much in mind, so he re-enlisted for three years in his old battalion. A few of his friends who had survived told him that he had missed a lot, that they had defended a large city for days, fought so well that they had been allowed to depart with their rifles. Yes, the Boche had won, because he had a lot of machines, tanks that knocked down walls, little cannon that would rip a house from top to bottom with one shot, flame throwers that gutted a building in a few seconds.

After a few months, his good friend and mentor, Lieutenant Marechal had returned. He looked very sad and worried, had lost weight. He drank more than usual, and he was somber. Perhaps because he could not write to his wife and children, who were in France, but in a part which the Boche occupied. Mohammed was bold enough to ask him, one day.

"My wife is dead," Marechal told him. "Killed on a road by a bomb from a plane. Of the children, I have no news. People are searching for them." Then he had laughed nervously and said: "Some day, we'll go back to France, Mohammed, and look for them."

"At your orders, Lieutenant," Mohammed had agreed.

Some of his comrades, who had attended French schools as boys, said that Marechal was also very sad because he, who had fought hard, been wounded, had not been promoted. It seemed that the French were now divided into two parts, some being for Vichy and others for a General named de Gaulle. Who the man Vichy might be, Mohammed had no conception. Sometimes he was also called Pétain, sometimes Laval.

The new captain, Bresmond, was for Vichy, and the lieutenant and he did not speak outside duty. Mohammed considered Bresmond a good officer. He was tall and good-looking, and he wore decorations that showed he was brave. There were more stars than palms on his War Cross ribbons, which proved that his bravery was admitted by his soldiers as well as his chiefs.

Mohammed could not help but know that those who followed Vichy were the masters. Every once in a while, talk would drift around the barracks that such and such a French officer, or sergeant, had fled to be with de Gaulle, or had been jailed for speaking well of the man. That did not worry Mohammed much; no one asked him about his opinions. If he showed up for inspection with a clean rifle and a neat uniform, he was left alone.

All in all, he was satisfied with his life, save that it was growing duller and duller. There was no more fighting against the Boche, no expeditions to the mountains. A few hours of drill and he could spend the rest of the day loafing around the big barracks or in town. He had a girl friend working in an establishment near the native quarter, and he would marry her ultimately.

One November night, the bugle sounded in the yard. It was still dark and the air was quite cool. But there was no mistake, the senior-sergeant appeared in the doorway and yelled for them to shake a leg and get down. The whole battalion was forming, and he filed by in turn to collect cartridges and grenades.

In the distance, toward the sea, there

was the sound of a heavy cannonade and when the wind was right, the hammering of machine guns, the prolonged crepitation of rifles. The company formed in combat groups, filed out and doubled for a while, toward the beach. The men around Mohammed were arguing. Some claimed the fight against the Boche had resumed, others insisted the English were attacking. Then the news spread from rank to rank. The newcomers were Americans. American soldiers.

MOHAMMED saw no reason for the Americans to come to fight. He had known many of them, when he had handled baggage at the bus station in Casablanca, wealthy, prosperous people, who gave money by the handful. He knew about their soldiers, too. His uncle, who had been in the other big war, had told him a lot about them. They had a lot of money, cigarettes, chocolate, they laughed and sang a great deal, and were excellent, if somewhat reckless, fighters. Like the Moroccans, if there was no real fighting going on, they would fight among themselves with fists and feet.

"They shoot well," a voice said.

They had left the sea road and the battalion was fanning out in the darkness. Now Mohammed could discern, in the distance, the flashes of cannon and rifles, the swift sparkling of machine guns. The combat was drifting nearer, in gusts, for there were long lulls during which the shuffling of booted feet in sand was clearly audible. Then, unexplainably, the company came to a halt. Mohammed made out the silhouette of the captain, slim and high in the saddle, trotting down the line.

"What's going on?" the officer kept calling. "Lieutenant Marechal, who gave the order to stop?"

"I did, *mon capitaine*."

"And why do you presume—"

Mohammed understood French, heard the conversation, but so many of the words were strange, the ideas so complicated, that he did not understand much, save from the inflections of the voices.

"Because, Captain, we have decided not to fire upon allies."

"And who are—*we?*"

"Myself and the good Frenchmen in this company, Captain."

"This is mutiny, Lieutenant."

"It's what it is. I don't care for names. But I shall not give the order to fire upon our friends, and will refuse to obey such an order."

"We are before the enemy, Lieutenant. We're attacked."

"The reason for the landing is obvious, Captain. Those who are for France will not resist. If you are pro-Boche—"

"My dear chap," the captain said in a sharp, level voice, "I'm a soldier, not a politician. I obey my orders and leave responsibility for them where it belongs. And the orders—"

"A good Frenchman—"

"Lieutenant, unless you take your place immediately, I shall regretfully have to blow your brains out!"

"If you do," a deep voice said from behind Marechal, where the European sergeants had grouped, "I'll shoot you like a dog, *mon capitaine*."

"As you please, Champier—" The captain's voice held a chuckle of excitement in it. It was not fear, the man was not a coward. "I repeat, Lieutenant, back to your place. I count three—"

Mohammed was quivering a little with excitement. These men would all do as they threatened. They were not small boys, they were soldiers, used to carrying arms, and they did not waste such words. If Marechal did not obey, the captain would shoot him, and if the captain shot the lieutenant, the sergeant would as surely shoot the captain.

"One—" the captain said, loudly.

"No need to count, I shall not obey."

Marechal was a fool, Mohammed thought. Did he want to waste his life, lose it here on the beach? In another moment, there would be two dead men, then three, then how many? It did not make sense.

Around Mohammed, the native soldiers had grounded arms. What happened in the world outside did not matter to them, the question was being settled by their own officers. There was a sub-lieutenant, a young Frenchman new to the Moroccans, who had come up and stood irresolutely to one side, but he did not count for much.

"Two—"

The captain was deliberate, giving Marechal time to think. Mohammed knew this was the right course. A man who thinks that death is close may suddenly buckle inside. Break. It was too bad, that Marechal should die stupidly like this. Mohammed remembered seeing him running across a field, waving his hand, yelling: "*En avant, les bicos!*"

This captain had not been there. He was brave, had fought well, but not with this company. He was an outsider, in fact. Not to the bulk of the men, who were new, but to the old-timers, to those who mattered. Mohammed's duty was plain. He shouldered his gun and fired at the captain.

THE SLAP of his rifle deafened him somewhat, blanked out the distant detonations. Then several hands clutched at him, there was a moment of confusion.

"Who fired? Marechal's voice asked, very calmly.

"Mohammed ben Rekabi, Lieutenant."

"Let him go." The lieutenant stood before Mohammed. "Why dids't thou shoot, Mohammed?"

"To save thee, Lieutenant."

"Ah? Leave him alone—this will be settled later. Well, Champier?"

"He's dead, *mon lieutenant.*"

"All right. Have the men pile weapons and equipment together—then everyone sits down. No sense in moving about getting riddled. When they come near—you know the signal, you said, Masson?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. I heard the radio instructions two hours ago." The young sub-lieutenant was speaking. "The beam of a torch directed straight up."

"You have a torch?"

"I brought one along, Lieutenant."

"That's all then." Marechal struck a light on his lighter, for a cigarette. As an afterthought, he handed it to Mohammed and took another for himself. "I'll see that you don't get into trouble."

"There will be no fighting for us?" Mohammed asked.

"Later—against the Boche."

"That's good," Mohammed approved. He hesitated a while. "On the side of the Americans, Lieutenant?"

"Surely. And for France."

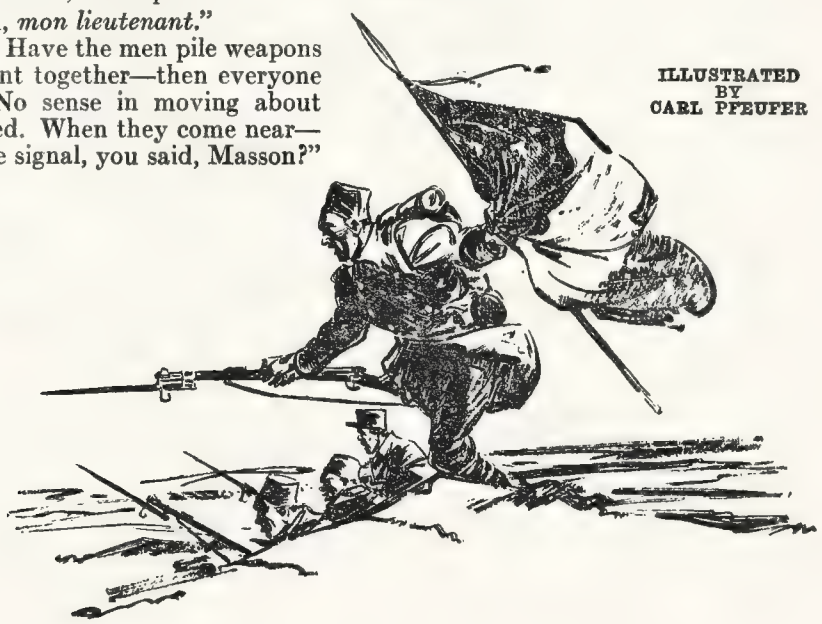
"They pay well, don't they, the Americans?"

Marechal drew on his cigarette, which cast a reddish, faint glow on his face. It was still sad, grim, but there was a new expression in his eyes, which Mohammed had not seen for many months. And he laughed, his old, careless, soldier's laughter.

"Oh, yes, Mohammed."

Mohammed sat down among his comrades. He was puzzled by many things. But mostly by the evident fact, that the Frenchmen, disarmed and waiting for their captors, behaved like victorious warriors!

ILLUSTRATED BY CARL PFEUFER



RAID ON JIGGER'S REEF

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Y'KNOW, Bill," said Porpoise amiably. "This war's something!" He uncorked a fresh bottle of gin and proceeded to drink his breakfast. He was sprawled in his old cane chair, under the poop awnings of our big schooner *Annabelle*, and his pajamas were all up around his fat belly. There were times when he made me wince, even if we were only a trading windship banging around the archipelagoes. You can go naked if you like in the Outer Islands, but at least you ought to figure a lady might walk down the docks of Brisbane where we were lying at the moment. This idea seldom bothered Porpoise though, unless the lady happened to be young and good-looking, whereupon he'd dash below and put on a shirt, and maybe some white pants. I never knew why, because the ladies'd just take one look at his bulges and then look at something else. But being mate for him for over thirty years I was used to it. "Y' know, Bill," he said again. "This war's something!"

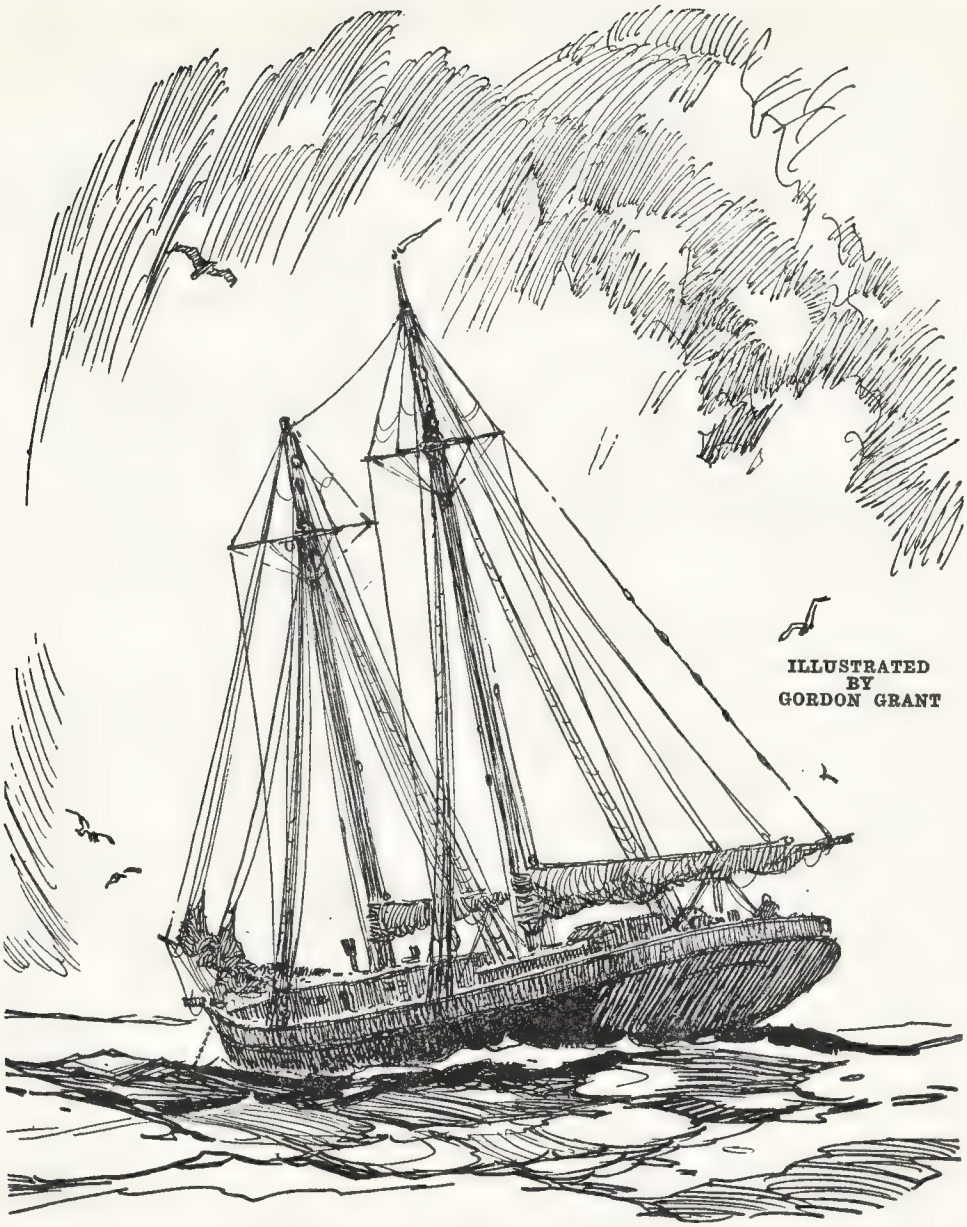
I said, "I read the papers, Porpoise. I even listen to the bloody wireless. I know a lot of chums are fighting, including in the Solomons and way points we know. I've heard—"

"Bill," said Porpoise, folding his hands across his stomach. "Bill, that ain't half of it. The Japs have taken over Reeves Atoll." I had to laugh at that.

"If you're a navy commander with a cruiser handy maybe you can drive 'em out," I suggested. "And anyway—" I stopped, suspicious. I knew Porpoise. "What's it mean to you?"

He sighed and looked at me owl-like, his china-blue eyes very innocent. "Bill, there's a fat shell bed in that big lagoon. And it's pearl stuff. Would you want

So we hauled our captive Japs back to the Annabelle and sailed for 'Stralia again.



ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

the Japs to flood the market with shell . . . or even pearls?"

I said, "No, but how'd you—" and Porpoise stopped me with a flourish of his bottle. "That's the trouble with you, Bill. You never figure. The concession for Reeves Atoll was held by old Jim Stevens. He lost it in a two-up game to Bob Roberts down Melbourne way. Bob was drowned off Tulagi Beach in the Solomons, and he hadn't anyone but a Kanaka wife who ran off with Trevor of the *What Ho!* Trevor was sunk by a raider last month and his wife was picked up by an American ship and taken to Frisco. She ain't showed up since. That leaves Reeves Atoll open."

"Except for the Japs," I pointed out. "And we're not exactly a battleship to move in."

Porpoise agreed. "No, Bill. We ain't. But you an' me knows Reeves Atoll back an' front, and more channels into it than anyone else ever found out. Also the

atoll's out the way and there ain't no other Japs going to move in without reason."

I took a turn up and down the poop, exasperated. "All right, cobber. If it's so important why ain't our own crowd moved in, and anyway, why did the Japs take it in the first place? They got other things on their minds besides pearl shell right now."

PORPOISE drank some more breakfast, wobbled his chins, and grunted. "You don't figure things right," he stated. "The Japs want it for reasons unknown. Maybe it's a stopping point to 'Stralia. Maybe they figure it'll be useful later. I dunno. Why us blokes ain't blasted 'em out I dunno either. Maybe they got too much other stuff to handle. But, Bill, them oyster beds. That's a bloody crime. And I aim to move in and stop it."

"There's a war on," I said bitterly, "an' you still think of profits."

"Eats," Porpoise corrected. "Bill, I gotta eat." He lifted the gin bottle and I checked what I was going to reply. No one but Porpoise could look you in the eye and mention eats while hoisting a quart of Hollands. It was a gift. But this business of tackling a Jap-held atoll with a cumbersome auxiliary schooner, and little else, was nonsense. As half-partner in the profits, if any, I felt entitled to a final protest.

"Look, Porpoise. We been lucky so far—dodging raiders and subs and such. Now, let's be reasonable."

"I'm always reasonable," he stated indignantly. "I'm just wanting a shell bed. Ain't that reasonable? And with us on the ghost edge of bankruptcy!"

"But how . . . ?" I started and he sighed. "Let me think," he said, and sank back and closed his eyes, which meant he was again cooking up something. You couldn't talk to him when he took that attitude. So I left him alone and went about getting the *Annabelle* in shape for what was a run with government stores to Shatuk and Anu, where they were keeping garrisons up in the Straits Archipelagoes, and I told Wong Fong our Chink cook to put an extra dash of curry into the fish on account of Captain Bailey was cooking up something. Porpoise liked his curry strong. His throat was calcined to any other flavor. Wong Fong looked at me and then tossed half a can of curry into his simmering chowder.

"Everytime skipper cook," he sniffed, "something happen. What for not stay in Brisbane? I not like Jap."

He waved his meat cleaver and I said, "Well, don't take it out on me. I'm just telling you the old man is going crazy again. We're fighting the war at Reeves Atoll. So make his lunch strong!"

Wong went off into some swearing jabberish, and I went back aft. Porpoise was talking, or at least looking up from his cane chair, at someone who looked official. Since he was wearing the uniform of the Royal Australian Navy I assumed my eyesight was as correct as my hearing. But how in hell Porpoise had got a commander of the Royal Australian Navy down on our tub I don't know. Navy commanders don't as a rule condescend to visit . . . well, you can figure that too. And Porpoise in his pajamas, drinking his breakfast and not even standing up.

"No," Porpoise was saying candidly and with considerable profanity. "No, I ain't got a bloody idea how it'll be worked, but gimme time."

"Time!" the officer exploded. "What the hell do you think this is? A war or a picnic?"

"Oh, smother down, Joe," yawned Porpoise, and it suddenly dawned on me the gold-braided navy chum was no other than Captain Joe Smithers of the old coast liner *Chucker,* who must have been snaked into the service on a towline. I'd been second mate under him on the Townsville run once, and if I wasn't smelling a ghost he'd been third under Porpoise in the Island trade and learned his business that way more years ago than I could remember. Which rather explained why Porpoise was still sitting down and Commander Smithers was still standing. It's rather curious, but even if you happen to be navy and official, you still stand up when you talk to your old skipper. I've even seen Porpoise once stand and take off his battered uniform cap to an old, old man

in Ponape. That's in the Line Islands. When I asked him why, he said, "Bill, that's old Cap'n Walsh. He taught me to spit to lee'ard when I was just so high. My first skipper!"

"Did he ever teach you sense?" I asked sarcastically, for at the time he was running after some Kanaka girl, and he said, "No, Bill. But the Islands are!" Which is just by the way.

"Now look, Porpoise," Smithers was saying, and Porpoise allowed his cigar ash to drop down his pajama front and said, "Joe, if we gotta talk war and you gotta be stuffy, you call me Captain Bailey. See? I got me feelings too."

Smithers went up in the air, waving his arms. "You've no dignity or respect for the uniform!" he exploded and Porpoise dropped some more ashes. "I got all the respect needed, Joe. You come to me and spill stuff and ask me to handle it. I say yes, being 'Stralia born an' a patriot more or less, an' you say O.K. and now you squawk. An' I can remember when I had to haul you out of the lee rigging when you were a pickaninny too scared to come down in that blow off Perth. I ain't in your class maybe, not being navy, but I seem to remember I got a master's ticket in sail, unlimited, stuck somewhere away; and I got a master's ticket in steam, unlimited, which I probably lost, an' I been to sea . . . well, hell of a sight longer than you have." The red was beginning to rise in Porpoise's throat and I knew he was getting mad.

"All right, all right!" said Smithers irritably. "I apologize—er—Captain. But this Reeves Atoll stuff. It's important."

Porpoise lighted another cigar and grunted. "It certainly is—that pearl bed—" he coughed—"the whole situation, I mean naturally I'm doing all this free on me regular run with 'Stralia stores as ordered, but you gimme the explosives and I'll attend to the channel."

"Sure, you're doing everything free," said Smithers, bitterly, sitting finally on an up-turned bucket, forgetting the navy for a while and turning back to an Island trader. He looked at me. "Bill, how can you handle this cow?"

I said, "Well, Joe, stun him or buy him another drink." And Smithers grinned and I knew we all suddenly understood each other again.

"Y' KNOW, Bill," said Porpoise, one day out. "Smithers is a pretty smooth customer."

"Which makes us what?" I inquired, ordering a reef in the fore and main, and the fore-stays'l sweated in some more. We were bucking a tough wind and the Kanakas had gotten some word of our destination and weren't too enthusiastic about jumping much to meet the Japs. Neither was I. Porpoise said, "Well, Bill, the job gives us a concession on Reeves Atoll. Hard and fast. And that means the pearl bed. And then too we're being patriotic."

"If you'd talk sense," I said, swearing at our Kanakas who were making a mess of getting the mains'l under control, "I'd maybe listen." Porpoise just sat on his fat stern and swallowed some more gin.

"Bill," he said solemnly. "You got no faith! Now take me—" The mains'l blew adrift from the robands then in a sudden squall and Porpoise came out of his cane chair like a balloon. I'll give him credit. He was a sailor when he had to be. His language blistered the deck, the sails and the spars, and we spent an hour getting things under control before we had the *Annabelle* into the wind again. Porpoise creaked back exhausted and took another drink.

"Now, where was I, Bill? Oh, aye. I got Smithers'—and that means the 'Stralia government's—O.K. that we get the Reeves Atoll concession. An' I got the dynamite, ain't I? Government stock an' all free. All we gotta do—"

"Sure," I said. "All we gotta do is blow a Jap raiding force out of the atoll. You said that before. What I want to know is how!"

Porpoise shook his gin bottle against the sky and shook his head. "Bill, Bill. Don't you remember when we first hit Reeves Atoll?"

I took a look at the compass and walked across to look over the weather rail. I knew something was coming and I wasn't going to like it. "Sure, chum, sure," I said. "We dropped by for water and repairs."

Porpoise coughed and took another drink. "I wouldn't for all the gold in New Guinea mention your private life, Bill—but there was a Kanaka girl on the south beach village—" I took a deep breath. I might have known it. I choked a bit. I'd loved Nini!

"Ten years ago," I said slowly. "I don't see where it belongs."

Porpoise looked owl-eyed at the sky. "She showed you a new channel into the Reeves Atoll, Bill. On account of her father being sore at your meeting—"

"We can forget that," I said shortly. "But how did *you* remember?"

"Look, Bill," grunted Porpoise, "I've always counted on you!"

"I been over thirty years in the Islands an' I remember a lot of things," said Porpoise dreamily. "That's maybe why I'm still alive. Maybe you too." He sat up and looked at me and suddenly he wasn't kidding. He was Captain Bailey, his blue eyes hard and his voice crisp. "Bill, you *know* that channel!"

"Sure, I know it," I said. "But that was private stuff."

Porpoise bit the end from a cigar and lighted it. "It ain't girl stuff now, Bill," he said grimly. "You an' me's going to make the run into the lesser lagoon of Reeves Atoll."

I got it after a while. I said slowly, "So you sold me, Porpoise. For the sake of getting that shell concession, you told Smithers I knew the east channel."

HE coughed and spilled ashes down his fat belly. For once he seemed embarrassed. "I ain't letting you down, Bill. I know it was a secret 'tween you an' the gal but we gotta figure on the Jap stuff now, an' you're 'Stralia born like me, an' I told Smithers we could handle it."

"You mean handle the shell bed," I said bitterly. "Porpoise—"

He checked me. "Look, Bill. I've always counted on you!"

That was like telling your mother you counted on her. I'd been mate for Porpoise for over thirty years and I already knew he counted on me just as I knew he'd get me out of any jam I got into. The big slob.

So I just said, "O.K., fella," and let it ride.

So we got up in the vicinity of Reeves Atoll in about ten days, and Porpoise was very mysterious about just what we intended to do, save for the fact that my knowing the secret channel was important. Just before we sighted the Atoll, which was quite a big affair, partly of high volcanic hills, with two lagoons, a lot of small islets inside them, and, save for a main channel, enough surrounding reefs to choke a shark, we heaved to and waited for dark. I might also add that I personally considered ourselves lucky to get that far through waters that were supposed to be swarming with Jap

ships, though it's true we had made the course from the east, which was a long way round and not likely to be covered.

"Now, Bill," said Porpoise, after eating, for a change, in the main cabin. "We'll sneak up on the coast."

"Sneak up?" I said incredulously. "Why, there isn't a damned light and what with the coral . . ." Porpoise shoveled in a spoonful of curried tinned mutton and then wagged the spoon at me.

"No, we don't get too close to the reefs, Bill," he explained tolerantly. "This is going to be a small boat job. You and me go in with a few of the Kanakas and *you* find the channel. Then, when we're in the small lagoon we toss a couple of the boys ashore and they work overland and do the stuff."

None of this made much sense. I said, "Listen, Porpoise. I maybe can remember the channel if I can ever find the entrance, but how you expect me to find anything when I can't even get my coast bearings, I dunno. And anyway it's been ten years."

He shook his head, ate some more mutton, washed it down with gin, and then dug up from somewhere in his pajamas a battered copy of the South Pacific pilot. He was all prepared for me. He importantly cleared his throat, thumbed over a page or so and read as follows: "Reeves Atoll—I'll skip the navigation, Bill, and get to the point—'On the eastern shore, where is reported to be a channel into the smaller of the two lagoons, there exists at night, for some reason, a curious phosphorescent phenomenon which clearly shows the various drifts and currents to the natives, who are expert at using them when sailing after dark.'"

I remembered then and said, "Why, that's right, Porpoise. You can just about tell where you are by the way the phosphorescence swirls around. There's one rock where it breaks heavy. . . ."

"Exactly," said Porpoise. He spilled more cigar ashes and settled back. "I remember you told me about it once. And that's where the channel starts."

I still didn't quite savvy. "It's risky to try it at night," I complained. "After all, ten years, Porpoise . . ."

He grunted. "That's just because that gal ain't waiting at the other end this time, Bill. You'll get the hang of it when you're started." He considered a while. "Maybe we could wait until dawn at that," he conceded. "Once we're close in. It ain't likely the Japs would have sentries or patrols on the east side. Even the pilot book says it's practically unapproachable except for natives familiar with the waters."

So that was how it laid, except he didn't tell me what the Kanakas we were going to land would try and do. Maybe he had a hunch about what might happen. The fat slob! . . . Well, never mind! I was first mate to him and I took my orders.

WE came up under the land after dark, with me swearing that a Jap patrol boat would see us, or maybe a plane come out, but nothing happened. Porpoise did say that Smithers had told him it wasn't thought the Japs had any planes around, and probably no patrol boats. Well, that was what Smithers thought, but he wasn't working up to a blank, dark, reef-hung coast like I was, trying to find a certain spot. In any event, I finally made an anchorage over a fishing bank I remembered, some four miles off-shore, a quartering moon giving me a little light; and using the night-glasses for a while, I finally figured where we were by a prominent clump of palms that had somehow taken root on the top of an enormous rock, the famous phosphorescent rock.

"O.K., Porpoise," I said. "If we gotta try it we gotta try it."

He grunted and got up from his cane chair with his bottle. "Bill," he said generously. "You're a great navigator." He took a drink. "I always knew it." As I'd been straining my eyes out and sweating blood since dark, while he had been relaxing, I felt like saying something back, but refrained. I had the boys get the whaleboat overside and after some shuffling around we started. It wasn't hard to get through the reefs once I had that phosphorescent seabreak around the rock spotted, and memory came surging back to help me. I'd run that channel a score of times with the

chief's daughter in the old days, and I remembered the choke I'd had when a shark got her off the main reef when she was swimming. But there wasn't too much time to think of that now, with the whaleboat hitting the inrushing tide and sweeping along. We went by the big rock, and the phosphorescence was spectacular, and I remembered you had to go hard a-starboard where it foamed over the up-jutting coral. Then you went dead ahead until the surf on Jigger's Reef gleamed white in the moonlight, and you slid to port with the phosphorescent stream and just followed it in. I was dripping with sweat when we floated into the smaller lagoon, and Porpoise, who had done nothing but get comfortable and gurgle on his bottle and complain about not being able to light a cigar in case anyone saw him, gave a satisfied grunt.

"Nice work, Bill," he said heartily. "Nice work . . . An' now we gotta beach her."

"What shore?" I said wearily. "The lagoon's all yours."

"North shore," he stated. "North shore's best."

So I had the men get the oars out and start pulling. We had had to use only the steering oar while we were in the current. And I beached the whaleboat as ordered.

"Nice work, Bill," said Porpoise again and then we all froze as a flashlight came on us. Porpoise swallowed so hard you could hear him. "So they *did* have a patrol on this coast," he said weakly. "And Smithers was sure . . ."

"Smithers and you were both sure of a lot of things," I said bitterly, and there was no time for any more because the flashlight came down to the water's edge and a sharp voice challenged once in Japanese and then switched, "Ah, the British . . . Land now!" There was some accent but it didn't matter. It was a Jap officer and a six-man patrol and we'd been caught in the act. I don't know why they didn't shoot us out of hand, but Porpoise always said it was because they were astonished and anyway wanted to find out where we came from and why. The main thing is we were herded up the beach to a large tent, inside which a light gleamed. Our Kanakas were slapped around a bit and then told to sit down on the beach, but some gun-muzzles prodded Porpoise and me inside the tent where two important-looking Japs were seated at a folding table, studying a chart, by the light of a hurricane lamp round which the usual giant moths and swarms of smaller insects were swarming. The officers looked up, irritated, as we barged in, and one barked some questions which the officer behind us answered. Whatever it was it seemed to cause some consternation.

The seeming big chief switched to English and addressed me: "And where did you come from? Where is your ship? Why are you here? Answer quickly."

I said, "He's the skipper," and jerked a thumb at Porpoise.

"Skipper, skipper?" said the Jap, frowning. "Ah, yes. The captain, you mean." He stared at Porpoise and Porpoise coughed and wiped his forehead on his sleeve.

"My ship struck a reef an' sunk not a coupla hours ago," he croaked. "Half the men lost. We just got away in time. We was aiming to make Formus Island but I guess I got off me course."

The officer who had rounded us up put in something then and the big chief snapped, "Well, if you are shipwrecked why are you found with so much explosives?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Porpoise. He was always good at telling things. "I been around the Islands a good many years an' I been wrecked a time or two, and you don't know what you're liable to find when you land, and a little explosive is handy to toss at the natives if they ain't peaceful." He mopped his forehead again. He was talking for his life this time and he knew it. "Also, it's better for fishing than anything else, and a guy's gotta eat."

I SUPPOSE a lot of his lingo puzzled the Jap, for he conferred with the other officers a while, and then called in our Kanakas one by one and fired questions at them in what sounded to me like bad imitations of half a dozen dialects. You can learn Kanaka dialects all right, if

you're around among the Islands long enough, but each group has its own way of saying the same word, which is why we always talk pidgin or *bêche-de-mer* English to all hands regardless, and that's something only us traders get the hang of. The Jap didn't have it. He tried everything I ever heard of, but you can always figure on a Kanaka looking stupid and acting the same when he doesn't like anyone, and none of ours liked Japs. So they just didn't understand. The big chief finally gave up and ordered Porpoise to translate his questions to the Kanakas. This was lovely. Porpoise addressed the Marshall Islanders in the Marquesan dialect, and our Fly River boys in the Marshall Island dialect. No one understood anyone, and when they ordered me to try I just said that for a fair cow I didn't know any Kanaka talk, which was mainly true if you count out the swearing and how to kid the *vahinas*, that is, the girls.

So it all ended in us being ushered out pretty roughly by a very angry officer, and ordered to sit down on the beach near a large fire and keep still. As they had the whole damned patrol watching us there was nothing much else we could do. Porpoise flopped on the sand, with a lot of grunting effort, and leaned his back against a rock.

"You know, Bill," he said, lighting up a cigar which had somehow escaped confiscation. "They ain't going to shoot us yet."

"Can you read minds?" I wanted to know. "It looks to me—"

"Shush, Bill. They still ain't sure where we came from nor why, and they gotta talk it over. Maybe they gotta get in touch with some other officers."

"At daylight," I pointed out, "they'll probably spot the *Annabelle* and they'll have a launch out for a look-see, and then where does our goose get cooked?"

"Maybe it don't get cooked, Bill," said Porpoise seriously. He coughed, blinked up at the great stars and dropped cigar ash on his shirt. "Bill, what's the big weed on this bloody atoll? I mean what makes the Kanakas cuss and work on a hoe when they don't want to, because it spreads all over the yam and taro patches."

"Why, that's the lush-berry," I started and then stopped.

Porpoise looked very comical squatting there on the sand in the firelight, like a Buddha looking at his own belly. But I began to get an idea what he was thinking. I managed a strained, "Well, Porpoise?"

"It ain't a cinch, Bill," he said dreamily. "But it's a chance. What's the lush-berry, Bill?"

"I don't know the highbrow name," I managed. "It's just lush-berry to me, an' the Kanakas squeeze it up and put the juice in the water and it stuns the fish so they float up."

PORPOISE smiled one of his bull whale smiles and spilled more cigar ash on his chins. "Which means it's as good as dynamite, Bill. And if you look back of you, you'll see a raft of lush-berries growing. An' if you look at the fire you'll see a big pot of rice all ready to be warmed up for breakfast . . . And if you'll look a ways to port you'll see our Kanakas, and particularly Siru who can steal a glass eye from a bronze monkey and move with about as much noise as one of them dancing girls we used to see in Sing'pore. Now if I just sing a bit in bush-talk don't pay no attention."

"It's a hell of a long shot," I objected and Porpoise said, "Shut up, Bill. You'll always be a first mate." And then he began to sing with a voice like a lost bull walrus, and even I didn't get all of the drift, but Siru evidently did. Everyone looked around startled at first, then the Jap sentries relaxed and grinned at the crazy white man, and the other Kanakas grinned too, but Siru stopped grinning after a few moments and made a curious motion with his hands. I suddenly remembered then that Siru was the youngest son of King Feringa of the Samson Group, and that sometime back in his lurid youth Porpoise had become blood-brother to Feringa. In the Islands that means a lot. I was always forgetting things about Porpoise, but he forgot

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nothing, and he knew that so far as Siru was concerned he was his adopted father. So he sang, and what he sang was not only obscene, as much as I got of it, but was also very instructive. The Jap officers peered out of the tent at first to see what the noise was about, but then with explosive comments withdrew.

When Porpoise subsided, which was a relief, and the Japs had finished grinning at him and apparently making jokes about his vast stomach, I saw that Siru had disappeared and the other Kanakas had huddled together so he could not easily be missed.

One officer came out of the tent after a while and asked Porpoise what seemed to me a lot of useless questions. He wanted to know how we knew the *Matsui Maru* was based on the atoll, and had we been sent ashore to attack her. As this was all news to me I could only stare at Porpoise and wonder why he'd been so secretive with his personal first mate. The *Matsui Maru* had been raiding through the northern Islands, and the 'Stralian navy had never officially been able to figure where she was based.

"Mister," said Porpoise, looking owl-like and innocent, "I never 'eared of that ship. Like I said, I'm just a shipwrecked trader." The Jap officer then did something that made me sick. He jerked a rifle from one of the sentries and with what I suppose was an oath swung it butt-first into Porpoise's stomach. I've made a lot of remarks about that stomach but I never expected to see it hit like that. Porpoise doubled over and was very sick. I came to my feet, boiling mad! Hell, he was my skipper! . . . and I got the butt on the side of my head—and that was that.

I came to, to find Siru bathing my face in the lagoon water. The fire was half-dead and only two of the Japs were alert, the rest asleep on the sand. The tent was dark. I said, "Porpoise?" and Siru nodded his head. "The big man is still sick," he said gravely. "But he will be better." And leaning around I saw Porpoise was on his back, apparently still in pain from his gruntings, but also apparently, from his spasms of swearing, not yet entirely dead.

"Is it done?" I asked Siru.

He looked at the two sentries who were watching us curiously, and he laughed. "It is well done, sir. The juice of the lush-berry catches fish. Why not yellow ones?"

IN the cool of the new dawn the sentries threw fresh fuel on the fire and placed on the rice pot. Porpoise was feeling better by now, and aside from his swearing and what I knew was a prodigious thirst, seemed reasonably recovered. The officers in the tent were bustling with life, barking orders or something, and all the Jap soldiers were alert and jumping around. The rice pot began to steam and one soldier served the officers filled bowls, together with tinned fish and some green coconuts, and then the soldiers ate themselves. They ignored us entirely, probably considering we could wait, and that was very considerate. I knew that Siru had crushed the pods of the lush-berry and dropped the juice into the pot, and I didn't want to be a stunned fish. He had done it very cleverly after Porpoise had quit singing, getting the other Kanakas to draw the Jap sentries' attention by performing native dances for them while he went silently back and forth to the bush. All in all it was a very neat job, which no green chum could have managed. I practically patted Siru on the head.

"Bill," said Porpoise weakly, about the time the sun was well up and every damned Jap was so doped he couldn't move—I hadn't thought the lush-berry was quite that good—"Bill," said Porpoise. He was still a bit groggy. "My guts are sore as hell an' I ain't feeling so good, but you tell them Kanakas to get busy now they got the dynamite back."

"I still don't know what the idea is," I protested. "What the hell are we supposed to do?"

"I didn't know the *Matsui Maru* was here either," said Porpoise kindly. "But Smithers had the idea." He lighted a cheroot he had found somewhere and frowned, and came down with what information he had. "An' I need a drink damned bad. But if you'll remember, the main channel to the big lagoon goes

through two headland reefs, high cliffs and close together. Well, you blow 'em up and choke everything. Even the *Matsui Maru*. The 'Stralian navy will take care of her later, once she's shut in."

"But they can blow themselves free," I objected, and Porpoise groaned. "Bill, you'll always be a first mate. A couple of bundles under them rocks will blast them into the channel. Nothing can get out save a sea-gull, and it'd be a long, tough underwater job to blow the channel clear again. Why I ever keep signing you—"

I said hurriedly, "All right, cobber," and found him some *sake* in the officer's tent; had the Kanakas bind and gag all the Japs; and leaving Porpoise behind to hold his sore gut and his bottle, told the Kanakas to go ahead. What happened is history, I suppose, even if I didn't know the angle at the time. The Fly River and Marshall Island boys eased through the Japs clustered around the big lagoon, babying me along through the jungle, and we planted the dynamite where it would do most good and stayed to watch the fireworks. There was the big raider *Matsui Maru* riding at anchor in the lagoon, along with a couple of tankers, and we got them all bottled up, and there was more yelling and screaming than you could imagine. We blew in the entire entrance, and if I do say so, it was a lovely job, a fair cow as we say in 'Stralia, and we all got out while the excitement was on.

You could see the Japs had no idea what had happened, except they were bottled in, and I thought what a soft thing it would be for Smithers to come steaming up now and lob a few shells over and then accept the inevitable surrender. Certainly there'd be no more raiding along the 'Stralia route, from this base at least.

We eased back through the jungle, and met a few Japs on the way, and I didn't look too much while the Kanakas went to work. I ain't a mug to worry about a straight shooting job but I don't like native ways any too well. They're sort of messy.

We reached the other beach at dawn and Porpoise, who was revived now, was drinking his breakfast as usual. He said, "What ho?" I gave him a description and then I said, "Well, let's get to hell out while we can." He gurgled a bit on his bottle and said, "Fair enough, Bill. This *sake's* terrible. Just pile the Japs in the boat and we'll go."

I said, "Do we have to be bogged down with a lot of Japs for ballast?" and he stated, "Certainly, Bill. I'd a bet with Smithers I'd bring him a few souvenirs." I had no more to say to that. You couldn't out-talk Porpoise. So we hauled our captive and still doped Japs back to the *Annabelle*, and we sailed for 'Stralia again, and apart from the fact that we got expenses out of it from the government, I still didn't see why Porpoise had let Smithers talk him into such a lousy job, even if we did know the channel. That is, *I* did! That is, also, I didn't see the angle until later. They gave me and Siru a medal which neither of us knew what to do with, but Smithers sent Porpoise six cases of gin. You figure it out, chum!

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Adventure, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1942. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Adventure, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of October, 1942. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 18, Register's No. 4W359. (My commission expires March 30, 1944.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

A GUN FOR FRANCE

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

BILL JETT couldn't see even now why he had lost Hammett's little yacht. There she was, pretty as a picture, sixty-five feet of white paint, teak deck and brasswork, looking unscarred, on an even keel, in Morani Cove; the West Indian sun lighting her clearly from stem to stern. Captain Bill grunted disapproval of old Trevan's chuckle.

"I say, m'lad, she looks as if you might step aboard, aft to your quarters, and your China boy'd fetch the ice and limes." The Colonial resident commissioner of Timego twisted his white mustache and chuckled again. "The only catch bein' that she's lyin' under some seven fathoms of water. Don't see how she did it on her own. Not a pilot of these out islands could have set her through that gap in the reef up here with her nose almost touching the coral. Odd, what?"

"More than odd. Dragged her hook before a black squall. Ordel said he couldn't get the motors going to run out. He was having trouble most of the way up from Trinidad. That's why I

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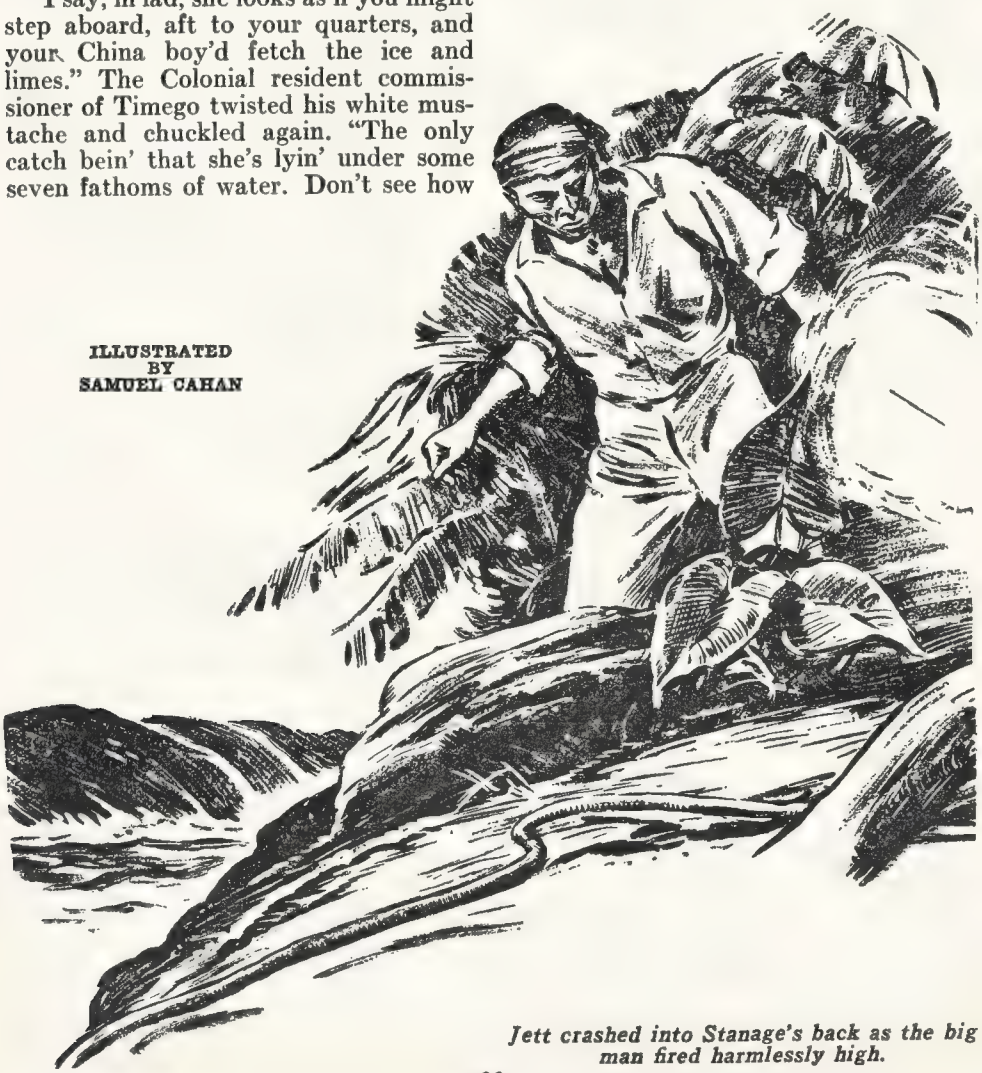

Jett crashed into Stanage's back as the big man fired harmlessly high.

anchored off Morani last evening. While he was tinkering with 'em I took Langi ashore. Wanted to call Timego port from Stanage's Hotel and try to get a cable through to my owner. Hammett's in the navy now. I couldn't reach him quickly."

Bill looked down from the ledge at his picture yacht. The eighty-foot cliffs about the tiny cove were hung with flame-vine and orchids, and bamboo and seagrape made a jungle of the ridge behind. Beyond the cove the calm Caribbean lifted gently over the two coral reefs but it must have been a mighty wave that spun the *Sea Flower* over them and into the white sands below the ledge where he stood. Likely she'd sprung a plate forward and sunk without a visible scar. Bill grew madder. He knew what he was up against for any salvaging aid these days.

"No wreckin' equipment, pontoons, pumps, all that, nearer than Port Antonio, I suppose?"

"Positively nothing in Timego. If there was you couldn't have it. Bit of a war down here, you know."

"My owner had a bit of war purpose. He instructed me to fetch his yacht home to turn in for Atlantic patrol work. Now look at her."

OLD TREVAN flicked his stick at a scissors-tailed humming bird above the orchid-clad cliffside. The Residency victoria and its black driver were waiting up the ridge at Stanage's Hotel, and the resident's custom, over at the drowsy, obscure little port of Timego, was gin-and-tonic at ten o'clock. He looked at his ancient watch.

"I'll take you back, m'lad. We'd stop at Stanage's for a bit of a drink but I don't fancy the man nor his liquor. You knew his place from other days? Timego was a bit lively in the old rum trade, and Stanage was deep in it. You were an American agent here, then, eh?"

"He knows me. Don't like the idea but I'll put up with him a day or so until I figure this wreck business out. My quartermaster, Lerum's gone over to port. Ordel too later. We've made reports to your port officer. Griggs wonders why we didn't come around the Head last night and lay off Timego. Well, no lights along your north shore for one thing. And Ordel's engine trouble. Then he says we were short of oil and would have to stop over. Ordel didn't want to go to the States; I've a suspicion he'd jump me here or Jamaica. The radio boy and deckmen did at Trinidad. Too big war wages to hold men on little private boats like Hammett's. I came up mighty shorthanded but we managed."

"Only four of you—with your China boy?" asked Trevan curiously.

"Couldn't sign a man at Trinidad. That is—" Skipper Jett hesitated. He hadn't reported to Griggs, the port officer, about Lenier, that gaunt, half-crazed stowaway, an escaped man from Guiana it seemed. A French penal settlement *libere*, with no papers, no clothes, nothing.

Of course he should have told the port authorities about the man; but Griggs had only asked about the crew. Having a stowaway to account for would only complicate things, and now Lenier had vanished as mysteriously as he had smuggled aboard the *Sea Flower* at Trinidad.

"Knocked overboard when we scraped that reef," Ordel had said. "I saw him go. Lerum was busy for'ard and it was mighty dark. Lenier was struck by something that got loose on the bridge. I saw him pitch overside and he struck bare coral—on his head. The beggar never had a chance. . . Do you think we should tell these Britishers that?"

The skipper hadn't at the time. Now he wished differently but it was awkward now also. Ordel said that the old quartermaster, Lerum, wouldn't mention it either. Lenier, and his mystery, whatever it was, had gone out with the tide. Jett didn't know any French, and Ordel had done all the interpreting when he had hauled Lenier out of the chain locker two days up from Trinidad and fetched him before the master. Langi knew a little French—from Tahiti years, but Langi said he could make nothing from Lenier's wild talk. Crazed by hunger, sun, and cruelty in his escape from Guiana with two pals in a stolen boat, both Ordel and Langi believed. The skipper set him to deckwork but he'd have to report the matter when he got the yacht to Charleston or Key West. Now Lenier had gone back to the sea—missing.

Bill Jett was morose over the wreck. If he'd been aboard. . . He grunted to Trevan, "Isn't there a diving rig of some sort in port? Got a bit of money and personal stuff below. Then chronometers and radio stuff could be taken out before salt water ruins 'em."

"Doubt you'll find any gear, m'boy. Try the chandler's in town. The beastly war, y'know. Everything grabbed up. Let's be goin', eh? You can't do a thing just now. A bit of a drink would help. No?"

"This evening at the Planters' Club," Jett said. "I'll have lunch at Stanage's. Langi's up there now cleaning my things a bit." He grinned at last and waved to Trevan.

BILL didn't want to stay at Stanage's even an hour but there was no other place this side of the ridge; a rough shore, and the uprock country was worthless even to the native blacks. Ancient rotten coral, lacy from wind and weather, covered with creeping

bamboo. A lone man falling into one of those concealed "cockpits" hadn't a chance of crawling out. Bill had hunted wild pigs through the hills and knew the spots where the black guides refused to go. He went on the steep path to the long unpainted wooden hotel; and how Stanage kept it going no one knew—or why. He went up the creaky front stairs and looked at the row of old wooden rockers along the wall. From here he could see the crinkling blue Caribbean beyond Morani Cove but not his little boat under the cliff edge. Rotten luck; there she was, and no job at all for a diver to salvage any personal stuff a man wanted. Bill had one change of whites, for Langa had brought them off for some repair over in Timego. And Bill had just thirty dollars and two five-pound notes with him. However money was no matter; he had many friends in Timego port apart from the American consul. But he hated to go back there with no plans for the *Sea Flower* to cable Hammett when he located the owner. Bill grinned finally; he'd hear no end of this at the Club in Timego; there was his little ship looking like a miniature in a clear green bottle for anyone to look at, until some proper gale did veer into Morani and roll her against the cliff foot.

"Got to get below on her, somehow," he grumbled. "Papers—stuff in my cabin—got to have it. Say, Stanage used to work in with the old rummies, and a couple were ashore along here! Now, Stanage—"

He was getting up to hunt the proprietor when he heard Stanage's thick voice from the darkened bar. Stanage was a Curacao Dutchman who had spent a lifetime about the British West Indies ports. Jett didn't like him but what he heard next set him back in his chair silently.

"The bar boy is off for the week-end, my frient. Better, eh? So few about—goot! Trevan and Captain Jett did not come back this way. I will say I cannot take guests now, you see. We can talk, Mr. Ordel."

Ordel! Jett had left him in Timego, pleading that he was badly shaken up by trying to save the *Sea Flower* when she dragged her hook. But the engineer must have slipped right out on Jett's tracks.

Glasses tinkled in the dusky room. Bill shoved close to the wall behind the jalousied door. Stanage, vast-bodied, shabby and his oily skin wrinkling behind his black beard, chuckled.

"No ice, my frient. Not over here these days. My rum is goot, eh? We are alone. we can talk. But we must act quickly. Captain Jett will try something, and the port officer will come again to investigate more."

"Quick is right." Ordel was nervous, sleepless, savage. "Well, how much you want for that diver's gear? Probably rotten, but there's no time for much overhaul. Rent or buy—how much do you want for the stuff?"

"Not so fast, my frient. No sale, no rental—I said a share."

Ordel laughed curtly. "Well, I expected that, knowin' you and your reputation for quite some years. You've got me, Stanage; come on."

"One third," said Stanage. "I take many chances. No, perhaps a half—if that third man is out of it. Better that way, eh?"

"Damn you!" muttered Ordel. "Well, let's sit down and talk it."

Jett heard Stanage waddle to the back room and the lean saturnine engineer follow still snarling. Ordel and Stanage? Jett didn't know that they knew each other. Ordel had signed on with him nearly a year ago when Hammett had the yacht in Rio. Ordel was American but apart from his papers Jett knew little of him. He wasn't a man you'd get to know.

"Gear—and Ordel wants it," Jett murmured. "Bit thick. What for? Stanage gets half? Runnin' dope? Stanage has done it in old days sure. Even if Ordel had something like that, what's his hurry? Stuff's likely ruined—or will be very soon. Third man in it? Must be a Timego agent."

Bill got up and went along the creaky boards slowly to the corner of the long veranda. Turning the corner he saw the detached wash-house snugged against the jungle-grown rock slope, and he could hear Langi humming and scrub-

bing his whites. Langi, half-Malay, had been with Bill Jett long before he ever had this berth with Hammett, the Texas oil man. Langi ought to know that Ordel had come over from port.

JETT was on the shrub-choked path to the wash-house door when he looked past the mottled stone wall up the slope. Close to noon, and a checker of harsh light fell through the leaf patterns, seagrape and tree ferns, upon the molded wood, litter of hurricane seasons past.

He saw movement. A face, a crouching shuffle that he knew. Bill steeled his muscles, for that man saw him. But when he turned ever so slightly the face vanished. Bill watched above and there was nothing.

"Lenier," he thought. "The French *libere*. Ordel swore the man was knocked overside out on the reef. No chance—drowned. Hiding out at Stanage's? Then they must know, Ordel and Stanage. Ordel lied to me. Then he lied more likely. He was worried when I changed plans and headed directly for the States. He said motor trouble, low fuel—he was bound that the *Sea Flower* put in to Timego. I listened to his advice. But he didn't think the yacht would pile herself into Morani and sink not forty feet out from the rockfoot! But now he's got to get on her. Well, I can stop any divin', searchin' below decks. Langi!"

He went into the reeking wash-house. Langi, over his tubs, before a stream of water piped in from the rain catchment up the hills. Langi looked up and grinned. The calm of old seas was in Langi's soul and eyes.

"Plenty ready to iron now." He held up the skipper's pants. "Iron soon. Ready by four when Mr. Stanage say carriage ready. He say hotel closed now. His carriage to Timego. Plenty better there."

"Yes. But—Stanage doesn't want me about. Langi, did you see anyone about this shack? That gibbering Frenchman, perhaps—Lenier?"

Langi's eyes widened. "That man? He dead! Drowned, Mr. Ordel say!"

"Yes, yes, I know. Let's call him so then." Jett looked up the jungle slope and listened. Langi stared at him in silence cunningly. Jett wasn't fooled. Lenier, fever-wracked body, dark gnarled face and his wild eyes. From Ordel's interpretations Lenier claimed that he had done five years in the penal settlements but nothing much in France before that. Some embezzlement affair. Jett hadn't cared; any escaped or time-expired man would claim innocence. Jett had been sorry for Lenier but sooner or later he'd have to turn him over to some authorities in some port or other. With the coming of war, men from the Guiana prison settlements had scattered where they could.

The captain decided not to tell it all to Langi just now. He asked of Ordel. How did Ordel come over the mountain this morning? Did Langi see him arrive and who with him?

Langi shook his head. He didn't know. Ordel had surprised him by coming to the wash-house and into the storeroom adjoining. He had been busy there some time. Jett went to the musty hole. Barrels, crates, tattered sailcloth and rope coils, discarded utensils from the hotel.

But dragged free from the junk was a battered dusty diving helmet. The copper and glass had been handled, and the valves cleaned. The lifeline hose and a brass pump were by it, the lines coiled. The skipper came out and wiped his hands. He grinned and Langi grinned.

"All right, Langi. Be ready at four, packed—and remember, you didn't see anyone or anything odd about here. And I didn't either."

Langi went on with his ironing. Jett swung up the side steps and around to the front. Stanage was in his wide chair fanning his greasy face, and alone. He seemed startled briefly at Jett's coming.

The captain grinned. "Bar open? Have a drink with me, Stanage." He sat down. "Damned hot down the shore. Can I leave at four o'clock?"

"From ten to four I do not drink, Captain. When you leave, yes."

Jett laughed. "A toast to the last guest away?"

"Today, yes. When you come back to consider the little ship you stay here. My boys will care for you. Too bad, your little ship!"

Bill went to his upper room. He was thinking: "Yes, I can come back after these fellows have pulled their job on the *Sea Flower*—whatever it is. My greasy old pirate, I'll have a hand in that!"

The sprawling wooden hotel was deathly still at high noon. The bedroom walls, for the air, did not reach to the ceiling. Jett listened but heard no skulker in the halls. When Langi came in noiselessly he started. The boy put the clothes on the bed, bent and whispered.

"I saw a man. When I leave washhouse he go in. I think Lenier, too."

"No think about it. It's the Frenchman, and his clothes have dried on him. So he got ashore last night. Take it easy, Langi."

"Place set for you on the porch outside dining-room. You alone."

"Fine. Don't want to talk. But when I act, Langi, you follow me."

LANGI grinned, went out. Jett saw no one when he went to luncheon. On the veranda, facing the distant hot glitter of the Caribbean across the jungle slope, a kitchen boy brought him the usual fare of the back country. Goat mutton, boiled yams, breadfruit, fried ackee in coconut oil. Jett picked over the mess; he knew it was the best they could do. When he lit a cigarette and sauntered to the front Stanage was fanning his face from his big rocking-chair. Jett grinned amiably.

"You know, Stanage, if I had a diver's rig I could go down myself and see just what's wrong. And get some things I want."

"No gear like that on the island now," Stanage chuckled. "Once, yes. You remember Captain Thomson who salvaged five thousand cases of Scotch from his schooner when he struck the second reef? That man goes away with an outfit I once owned. No goot, that man."

"What's my bill?" Jett grunted. "May not see you at four."

Stanage waved a hand grandly. "From shipwrecked skippers I do not take pay, my frient. When you return to work on the little ship it will be business. Not now, my frient."

"Thanks." Jett went above for a siesta as Stanage would do also. In the afternoon heat not a sound or movement. Jett dozed and stirred when Langi came in. The skipper swung up alert, and Langi knew he had some plan but he said nothing, watching the hall.

"Nearly four. I hear the stableboy and the horse. Far out I see a boat, very small."

"They have some sort of sloppy offshore patrol I think. I'm not considering it. Nor the road constables up the hill road. I hope none call in. Ready, Stevie?" He called down to the black boy who had fetched the rickety victoria with the fringed canopy before the side steps. They went down and got in and Stevie watched silently up at the shuttered windows. Jett knew eyes were behind those blinds and ears were listening.

"All set, Stevie. Careful of that graveyard nag of yours on the Nannytown Turn. Good two thousand foot drop, isn't it?"

"I think so, sar. We get to Timego at dark, sar."

He whacked the bony animal and the carriage rattled about the unkempt drive. Jett closed his eyes when the slow ascent began. Two hours to the ridge top, quicker down the Timego side to port. The ridge was barren cockpit country, bamboo and giant ferns over steep gullies down which mad little rivers crashed to the abrupt coast. Jett roused and looked about when he felt the breeze in the open. Langi was watching him steadily, and his fingers touched the skipper's knee. Jett nodded back and muttered sleepily.

"Stevie, that nag of Stanage's ought to rate a rest before he takes the top. We all could do with a leg-stretching."

"Yes, sar. In a minute, at the branch road it's best."

They crept to Nannytown Curve, the top of the hogback ridge where one could see both ways, but a black squall hid the western slope and the sea beyond it. Sunlight was upon the steeper east-

ern slope up which they had crawled for hours. Stevie turned.

"We get wet, sar, down Timego side. Better we wait. There are caves along the top, sar, very dry for people to stay."

"Good enough. Your animal is pretty close to being fagged. Let's turn off the road."

"Thank you, sar," Stevie said. At a wider space of the road strip he pulled to the left, close to the rock wall and stopped. Jett saw the dark, vine-hung opening when Stevie got out. Langi slipped the other way and looked at Captain Jett. Jett hit the ground on the other side and they both turned on the driver swiftly. Langi's brown iron finger choked his wind. Jett pinioned his arms and let him to the ground. The black boy's eyes showed white in fright but he made but one struggle. Jett grinned down at him.

"Easy, Langi. Turn him over. Listen, boy—do as I say and you're right enough. I must tie you up and chuck you away where you can't be seen or heard. Not bad—until daylight. By then you'll be released. You get it—right?"

"What be?" gasped Stevie. "What I do? What you do, sar?"

"Nothing much. Except we don't go to Timego yet. Drag him along, Langi. Plenty of good spots back in this hole. Come on."

STEVIE limped, half-pulled after by his cord-bound wrists. He laid down and Langi expertly bound his ankles, and when he tried to protest Jett got rough with a cuff on his ear. The black boy quit and begged not to be gagged. Jett knew there was not a chance of anyone passing this road tonight. The natives feared weather and *zombies* in the dark. They looked Stevie over again and went out to the road. The horse seemed asleep between the shafts, and Jett grumbled.

"Langi, you guessed what was in my mind well enough. To sneak back to Morani Cove tonight and see what Ordel and Stanage are doing with a diving rig on the *Sea Flower*. First, put Stevie away. But I forgot about that damned horse. If it had been a car we could shove it over three thousand feet from the cliff into Morani Valley. But a horse, now, is something else."

"You see," said Langi. He was unhitching the decrepit nag and led it back. Then he took the shafts, with the harness within and backed the ancient carriage along the road, turned at the narrowest strip and shoved it out. Jett was nearly right about three thousand feet but the rig didn't need that much. They heard it catch and crash from ledge to tree and on to silence. Langi went back to the horse. Jett was looking about for any telltale marks by the road. Then he went back past the cockpit caverns under the drooping lianas and found the old hunting trail that clung to the ledges downward and back to the rugged coast. That horse didn't like it. They pulled and shoved until he was past a spot where he couldn't climb back.

"Good old beggar!" Jett grinned. "You've got to find a way out yourself down to the flats. I think it'll take you some weeks. Langi, Mr. Stanage may run to the constables with a charge of horse-stealing, eh?"

"No, I think. Mist' Stanage too su'-prised to say anything."

"If we surprise him first. At least we'll find out why Ordel lied about Lenier being dead. Lenier is the answer. Shouldn't wonder if they didn't have a hand in why the *Sea Flower* sank so neatly in Morani Cove. That gale fetching her in was a bit of luck for someone. But if she'd sunk out between the first and second reef that would have been no luck. Too rough a job, and she'd have broken up later. But as it is, there she sits in a safe spot as can be for a time. Safe from official inspection and any salvage right soon. No one has time for it."

Langi climbed down carefully holding to the master's newly laundered whites. Jett wore his soiled shorts, singlet and old sun helmet and when they struck a slope of creeping sword bamboo it was bad. Beneath the mat there were rotten rock holes not to be seen until the edges broke under a man's weight. Jett had

chased wild pigs along here which fell into cockpits from which there was no escape. Men had done the same and never been found. Below the stuff they descended to the tree bamboo and ferns and made better time in the gloomy shade. But at last Jett stood on an open headland, the crinkling sea to the east and the broken cliffs to the south and north. He sat down and Langi handed him a cigarette. Then goat mutton sandwiches from his blouse pocket.

"Listen," Jett grunted. "You didn't ask Stanage or his kitchen man for these? He'd know we didn't need them on the way to Timego."

"I am afraid—" Langi grinned. "The boy was out. So I stole. It's so."

Jett got up, munching. "Come on, Langi. You guess at everything. We must hole up where we have a view of Morani Cove, and very close. What's done must be before dark. An hour yet I think."

Langi followed down to where a coast trail led over the broken cliffs around the Cove. Then they went watchfully, silently, looking up the worn path that led to Stanage's place. Crouched and listening long, Jett crossed it quickly and skirted around to where he was on the ledge where he and Trevan had inspected the sunken boat today.

"No one's been here yet. Find cover, Langi, and out of their way. They can't wait and they can't show a light to be seen offshore. So whatever the job they must be at it soon. Come on."

They went higher and slipped under broad seagrape, clearing one spot where the pink calm cove water could be watched. The *Sea Flower* near the cliff foot was slipping into shadows but she still looked like a miniature yacht contrived in a delicate glass bottle.

They waited awhile and Langi murmured, "We no gun, Captain."

"No. But it wouldn't be needed. I merely want to know what Ordel and Stanage are up to. It can be handled later by the port officer. No one can leave Timego without permission."

"Maybe," said Langi, "you no want to tell port officer or anybody. Suppose

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something only for you and me to know?"

Jett stared at him. "What you mean? Wait—be still—"

PARROTS were calling from the cliffs. Sea birds flashed white over the easy surf on the reefs. But he heard heavy steps on the path. Langi crouched lower for there were voices. The brush parted and out upon the ledge directly above the sunken boat Ordel came, and he carried a battered copper helmet and hose coils. Then Mr. Stanage in his soiled linens and a tool kit. Then came Lenier, bowed and shambling, with the rest of the gear. An air pump and loops of lifeline. Ordel snapped an order and Lenier began stretching the lines along the rock. Stanage sat down, fanned himself and chuckled.

"Nize little ship! Here in my front yard. What a pity! So she must stay awhile. Now my goot frient, Captain Jett, will surely be back tomorrow so you must leave nothing disturb that he notice. Careful, eh?"

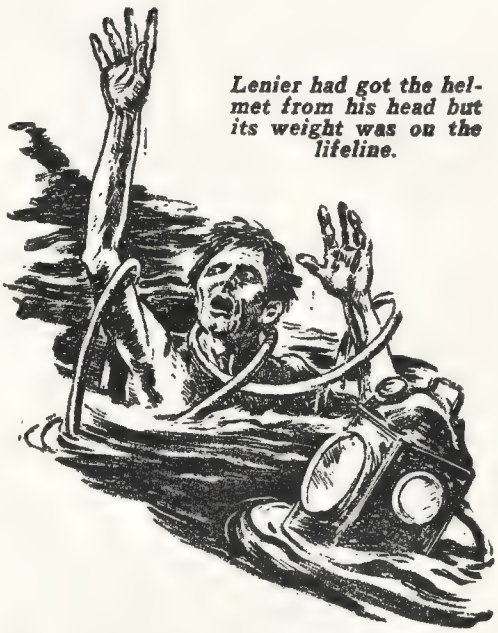
"He can notice and be damned," Ordel snarled. He rapped out nervous French *patois* to Lenier, and the Guiana man seemed to shrink under the orders.

Ordel crept along and inspected the airline, every inch of it, and the pump and fittings. Ordel came back to Stanage and muttered.

"A boat or raft is out of the question. The man who goes down will have to swing from the rocks and then walk out to her. It's easy enough. Lenier hasn't much strength but he's been a diver he says. Old days when they tried for pearls along the Mosquito Coast. He can handle this. It'll take the best man up here on the hoist. You can handle the pump and air, Stanage. It's no task. We'll clear out in an hour."

Stanage waddled to the Frenchman who sat with the copper helmet on his knees, feeling over the airline stealthily. Stanage looked like a gray buzzard above the gaunt man, watching for a sign of life before he tears the flesh of the dead. He came back chuckling.

"So our frient knows no English. That is goot. You understand what I said,



Lenier had got the helmet from his head but its weight was on the lifeline.

Mr. Ordel? Old gear, poor lines. It might be unfortunate."

"Shut up," growled Ordel. "Lenier's crazy with large ideas about Free France and what he'll do when he gets to West Africa. I smuggled him aboard the yacht under Jett's nose but I didn't believe his yarn—until he proved it. Now I know what you're thinking."

"My gear is old, unfortunately. He knows that."

"Not as rotten as you are. Well, let's start."

Ordel turned and went to Lenier, growling the *patois*. Jett saw the glitter in the Frenchman's wild eyes before the helmet went on his head. Ordel cleared the lines. Stanage had the brass pump. Ordel tapped the diver's bare shoulder, then he was lowered from the ledge. The next Jett saw was the man on the white sands walking to yacht's midships rail. He climbed aboard slowly. Bubbles came up and the soft hiss of air from the pump. Ordel cleared the lifeline and another warped to it under Lenier's shoulders. Ordel growled.

"He's got my keys. He knows—the lower locker under my berth. First door portside the companionway. He's below now. Keep the air—"

They waited in rapt silence. The lines

moved a bit. Then Lenier had signaled. Ordel was on the dragline excitedly. Two small boxes came above the hatch. Then Lenier's helmet, and he was working at a loop. Then he dragged the line below again. Ordel relaxed.

"Three more. He'll make all fast, and I'll make one drag of 'em. Then—well, remember, Stanage! Don't fumble your end."

The dragline tightened again. Lenier was signaling. Ordel hauled, and the Frenchman's helmet came above the hatch again. He was helping on the burden and it came out. Three wooden boxes to join the others, none much bigger than a mechanic's kit. Lenier stood above them and waved. Jett guessed he was tired even from this shallow underwater work, but he knew the job. He was making a double loop to hold all the boxes and seeing that the line cleared the yacht's low bulwark. The burden came overside and dropped neatly to the sands and there would be a clear haul now to where Ordel and Stanage stood. But Ordel did not haul. He laid the line down and muttered to Stanage.

"Well, that's it. I don't think Jett or anyone'll ever know that she was tampered with. Lenier disturbed nothing. Not a clue left when we get rid of the gear up here. We're through with Lenier. He's not safe to have about on Timego. So now this must be quick, Stanage."

Jett saw that Lenier had swung over and stood on the sands. He couldn't be seen clearly when he walked slowly to the foot of the rock. Ordel sprawled out looking down at him. Then Stanage grunted. He had stopped the pump and doubled the hose. The air stopped.

"You have to do next, my frient," Stanage said. "Go down there."

JETT shoved his knees under him for a spring. There was some kind of struggle over the ledge. Lenier, his air gone, was fighting to get the heavy helmet from over his head and swim up. Ordel slipped down the ledge to meet him, and Jett could see neither man. But Ordel had the lifeline and it had been cruelly hitched about the diver's armpits as well as the helmet ring. The thing was a drag on a man trying to rise some forty feet up the rock face. Stanage chuckled again. He squatted deliberately upon the airline.

"Safe enough, my frient. Lenier will be found drifting in the cove tomorrow, where he would be expected on an uptide. I myself will find the body, early, and telephone to Timego. A moment more, eh?"

Jett burst from the seagrape cover and was behind Stanage's back. Langi was following, and Stanage saw him first. The big man was quick. He let go of the airline and jerked an ancient Luger from his side pocket. But Jett crashed into his back as he fired harmlessly high. Jett heaved on him and the man was unwieldy as a vast toad.

"Get his legs, Langi—over with him!"

Stanage went over the upper ledge, twenty feet down upon Ordel who had glanced up. They went off the waterline ledge together. Jett saw, past them, Lenier's wild face and lank hair. He had got the helmet from his head but its weight was on the lifeline which Ordel had tied under his armpits, for further safety he had said. Lenier tore frantically at the line and it came down in fatal loops. Then he stopped, for he was drowning now. Jett saw the bubbles rising from his open mouth.

"Get to him, Langi, and fast. The airline's useless to him now even if we started the pump. I'll haul the lifeline—"

Then he couldn't. Ordel had been knocked overside by Stanage's bulk but he had crawled back to the ledge. He got one knee up and lunged to Jett's legs. Jett fell back and Ordel was higher, dripping, savage-eyed now as he recognized the other man. His long face tightened but he said nothing. He beat Jett to his feet and crashed at him with a sheathknife out. Langi had dived for the drowning Frenchman, and there was no room on this two-foot ledge for two struggling men. Jett sprang for Ordel's knife arm and just missed the blade as he struck. Jett sidestepped and swung right and left on Ordel's face and then heaved into him. Ordel yelled then and went over down in tangling lines. Jett

was gasping for breath as he fumbled for the lifeline.

He staggered and hauled, and Langi was swimming above the limp Frenchman. Then Jett dragged them both clear and Langi scrambled out. They got the senseless man up and laid him face down on the wet rock.

"Look," whispered Langi, "see—down!"

Ordel had gone down under Jett's punches, far enough below the surface for Stanage to grab his legs. Stanage couldn't swim and he rolled like a wounded porpoise above the sands. Ordel looped his body and tried to break that death clutch. He hammered the bearded face and open mouth under him, but Stanage was out. Jett saw Ordel's wild face turn up once and then he too was choking.

"We wait," said Langi calmly. "Not long now—"

"To hell with them! We couldn't do a thing anyhow. Get this man up on the bank. Only chance to know what this is about is to save Lenier. Up with him, get the water out of him."

"It is so," said Langi, working at the knot about Lenier's thin ribs. "Also it is so that, with belly fully of water Mr. Stanage even more heavy. No lift, and no let go Mr. Ordel. It is so now."

They dragged Lenier up the rocks to the wide ledge. Jett worked expertly over him in the dusk. When the man moved feebly Langi went to the edge of Morani Cove and looked down.

"All quiet now," he reported. "Very much. Soon dark, too."

"Go back to Stanage's," Jett ordered. "Get in his bar and find brandy. You might loot some cigarettes also. Pay no attention to Stanage's houseboys. Throw them out if they bother you. Tell them their boss will be back after the constables get here. I'll telephone later."

Langi had gone to that dragline which had been forgotten. He hauled on it and called the master. Lenier was slowly reviving.

"Come see," said Langi. "This heavy, I think. Five little wood cases. Maybe so you better look, Captain."

Jett went to the ledge. The first stars were out over the gray twinkling Caribbean beyond the reefs, and the forested ridge was fading against the last sun's red. But he could still see Hammett's little yacht, a shadowy picture against the Morani sands. He couldn't see the two dead men close to her sprit by the rock foot.

"Heavy," Jett grunted. "You're right, it's heavy. Don't fray this rope on the ledge, Langi. I'd hate to have to go down to join Ordel and Stanage, even to get the truth. Heave, and carefully."

He hauled, and Langi cleared the burden over the rocks. It took Jett's strength to swing the loop-bound burden over the ledge where they dragged it on towards the path.

LENIER sat up and pointed dumbly with a shaking arm. He babbled words, and Langi knew some French from old trading days in the South Pacific. But Jett came to Lenier and patted his lank, wet hair.

"Gold," he said. "Easy to guess. Small boxes as these—heavy and metal bound. I see marks on them too. Must be some two hundred pounds of the stuff. I say, it's gold. What you guess, Langi?"

They both grinned. Lenier nodded and broke into wild talk.

"He say—gold, sure," said Langi. "He say French gold. He say it from ship from France once in war. From Martinique also, to Guiana. He say he and two friend steal it from Frenchmen they no like. What you say, Vichee? He say they steal it from where it hid in Cayenne, and try to save for Free France sometime? Is that right talk?"

"Right talk is so," grinned Jett. "We got to get word to port and an interpreter. And put this man in bed. Further, watch his gold for him until the authorities take charge. For the Fighting French, eh? Hope it's on the level. Lenier's got the eyes of a fanatic, a crazy man who would give it for Free France if he could. But I've got to know how it got on my boat. Langi, by my guess at weights, there's some eighty thousand dollars of gold here. If it's around two hundred pounds. It must have come on at Port o' Spain where I left Ordel in charge. Where he smuggled

Lenier on, also, in the chain locker."

"Two hun'red pounds," said Langi. "About what Mr. Stanage is heavy. It is a trade—two hun'red for two hun'red. He make the trade."

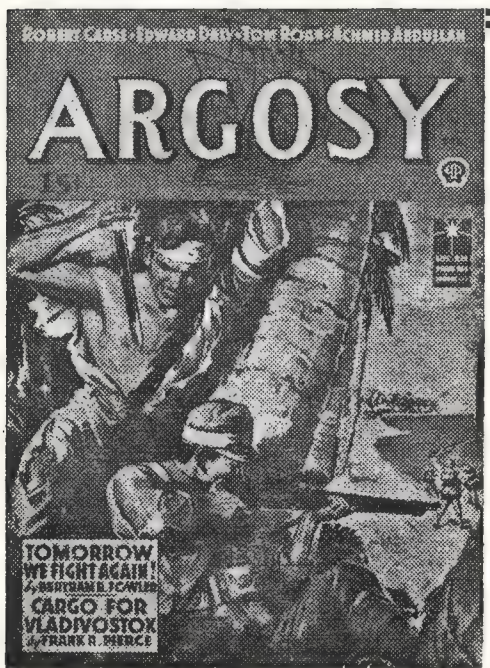
"Traded, and got death to boot. Langi, is your French of Tahiti enough to explain to this poor devil that his new pals were drowning him? Leaving him to be found in Morani, just another mystery for good old Trevan to ponder over his morning's gin-and-tonic? Try it."

Langi did and Lenier jabbered excitedly. Jett listened patiently.

Langi turned. "He say he think so, they bad. He not trust anybody. Rob him sure! Mr. Ordel get him and the gold aboard when you not there. He make this man be very quiet on the boat. Pretend he most crazy—so you make not a thing of it. But Mr. Ordel tell him if they can come to Timego he has a friend who will aid them, save the French gold. Lenier no like but what can he do? Mr. Ordel persuade you to lay off Morani near Stanage. Hope to smuggle ashore but that squall come up. Once in the cove in trouble Ordel know you come quick back, see what damage. Then he open the valves, help her sink to delay you going on her. He think Stanage have the old gear. And he made Lenier swim ashore and hide until you go away to Timego again. You see?"

"Looks reasonable. He's not so crazy. Cracked up a bit. Ordel sure made a sap of me, engine trouble and all that, to make me lie out here. Langi, these Colony Britishers are a hard lot to explain dead men to. I'll do my best with Griggs and Trevan. And I salvaged that French gold from a ship I commanded. I've an idea, in the end, I can wangle it into the right hands. And clear Lenier. He wants West Africa—and action for France. We'll get him that! But first to the hotel and a call to the port people. Old dotty Trevan will want a brace of drinks at the Planters' Club when he hears. I can do with one myself. And ask Monsieur Lenier if he could go a vermouth, perhaps, for France?"

Langi grinned: "Not so crazy! First, he say—a gun for France."



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OF SORCERY AND

A CARADOSSO NOVELETTE

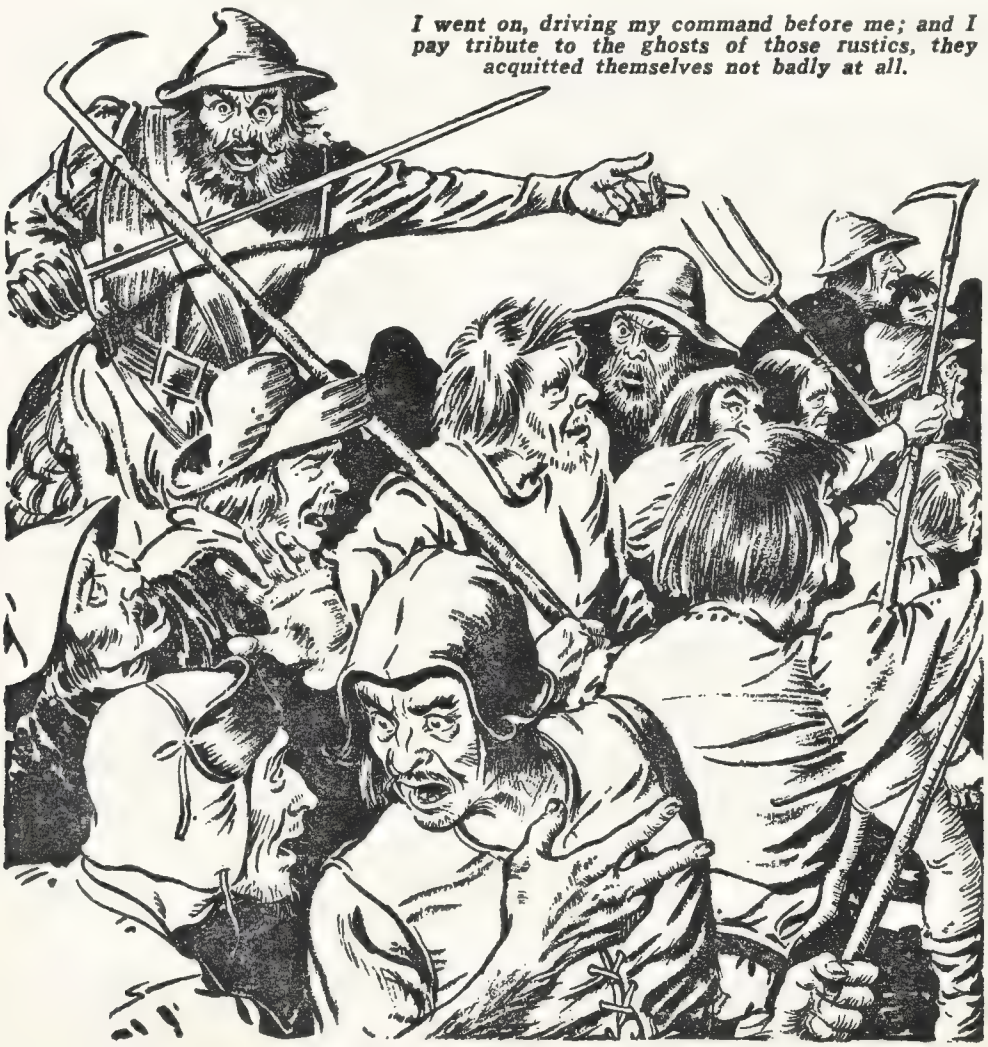
TO His Most Excellent Lordship, my Lord Duke Pietro IV of Rometia; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these:

Sire:

As I understand the case, it is thus; and God forgive whoever led Your Eminence to put it to a poor old pensioned soldier; *videlicet:*

Your Grace hath ordered burning of an old woman's hut in default of taxes; the said hag hath cursed Your Serenity root and branch; Your Lordship's little heir hath developed a colick, and Your Highness would like my advice whether hanging the said woman would lift the said curse.

Well, sire—the messenger was all agog to take my opinion with him; but have I gained the age of eighty years and a certain reputation for wisdom, by saying



I went on, driving my command before me; and I pay tribute to the ghosts of those rustics, they acquitted themselves not badly at all.

SWORDPLAY

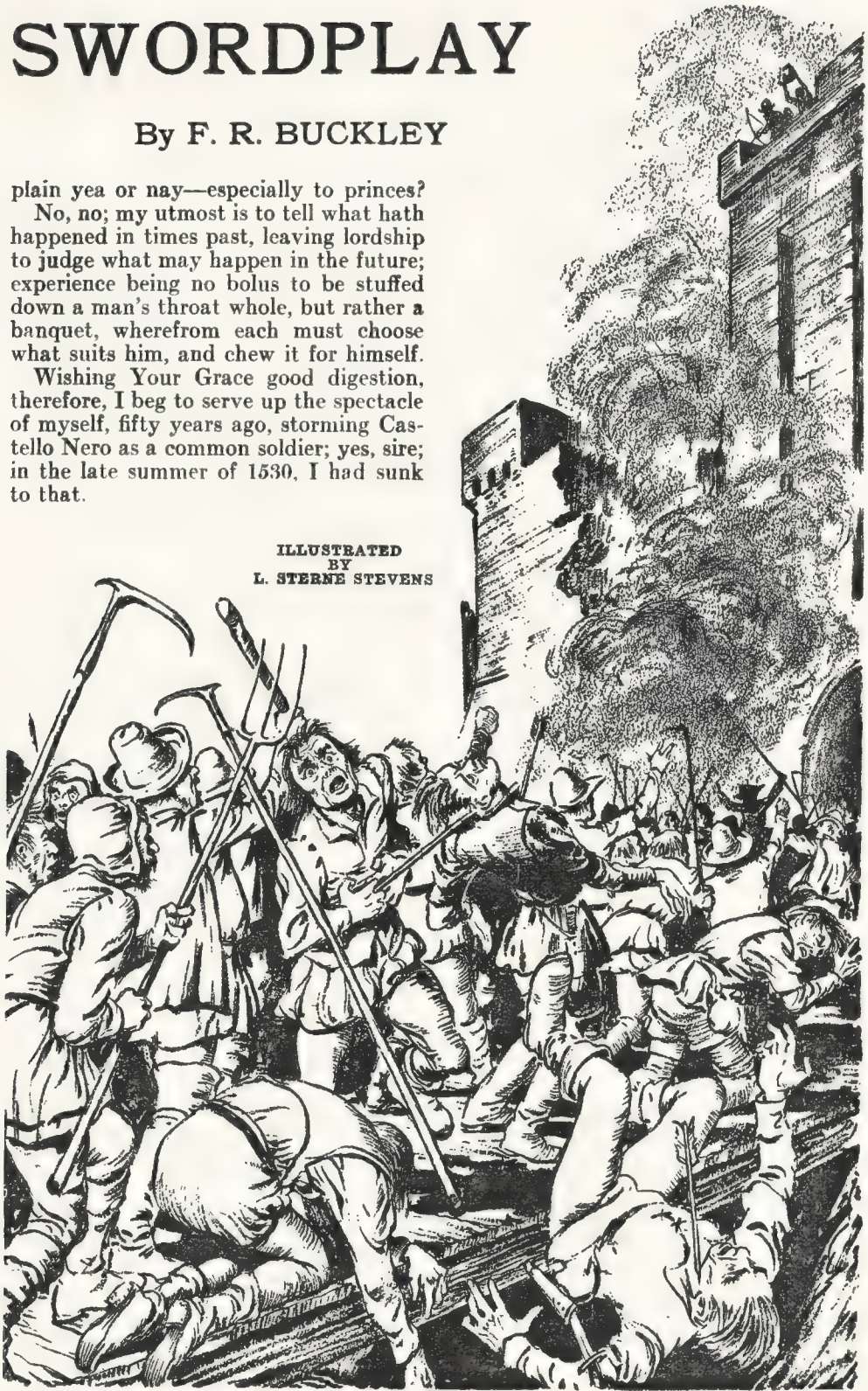
By F. R. BUCKLEY

plain yea or nay—especially to princes?

No, no; my utmost is to tell what hath happened in times past, leaving lordship to judge what may happen in the future; experience being no bolus to be stuffed down a man's throat whole, but rather a banquet, wherefrom each must choose what suits him, and chew it for himself.

Wishing Your Grace good digestion, therefore, I beg to serve up the spectacle of myself, fifty years ago, storming Castello Nero as a common soldier; yes, sire; in the late summer of 1530, I had sunk to that.

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS



FIRST, those damned Venetians had caught my troop of free-lances in a swamp; then, having thrust me out of the captaincy of Nola, Your Grace's grandsire had not taken me into his own service—doubting, I surmise, whether I were villain enough for his purposes; and finally, the lance-wound in my foot had laid me by for three weeks with a fever. My horse was sold long since; my best armor that I had taken from Simon Boccanegra, God rest him, was already in pawn to the inn-keeper; and had not Bertuccio Bucca (later my lieutenant) come by recruiting just when he did, God knows I should soon have lacked the sword and belly-armor to enlist profitably as a foot-soldier.

I pass over the shame of marching with raw country levies who had not even these utensils, and come to the moment—eight hours after my enlistment—when I was leading some two score of these louts into a breach. Our sappers had undermined and brought down a tower of this Castello Nero—a nasty damned beetle-browed fortress of black stone; the siege engineers had run a covered wooden bridge across the moat, and Bertuccio, having appointed me a sort of left-handed sergeant, had ordered me to cross the bridge before it could be set afire.

"A few bags of earth on top—" I said.

"Dost thou go?" asked Bertuccio. "Or do I stab thee?"

I went, driving my command before me; and I pay tribute to the ghosts of those rustics, they acquitted themselves not badly at all. They lacked armor, of course; they lacked weapons (except the billhooks they had brought with them from their farms) and they lacked knowledge of the military use of those; but at least they had sense enough to fear me more than the enemy in front of them and so, as I say, they did pretty well.

The purpose of them was less to do execution on the besieged, than to cause these gentry to fire their cannon; whereafter—while the gunners were reloading—proper troops might attack with less expense. There would still be arbalestriers and archers and arquebus men, of course; but the holes made in armor by such weapons can be patched up again, whereas one smack with a petronel and clang goes a whole breastplate—or with chain-shot maybe half a dozen at a time. I mean—had not Bertuccio known his business and been lively in the interest of his lord, the discharge that met us as we left the bridge might have cost two hundred crowns in smashed plate alone, not counting the value of trained men; whereas, merely striking down some couple dozen of those yokels, it cost nothing at all.

What was left of them seemed inclined for an advance to the rear; but in that direction, of course, they found me, and so they went on again. Indeed, such was their anxiety to do well in my esteem, that some dozen of them advanced quite away from the protection of the tower-ruins and might have formed a useful screen for Bertuccio's stormers, had not the bridge at this moment caught fire and made further attack impossible.

IT WAS with difficulty I myself got back, to stand with Bucca and watch the end of the business. It had been late afternoon ere we marched in; now it was dark, save for the blazing bridge, and when this burned out we turned away.

"Dismissed!" says Bertuccio to his men; it was not good to have them standing there, listening to the cries from the other side of the moat; and to me: "Thou'st had some experience of this work, hey, fellow?"

"Yes," says I.

"Yes what?" snaps Bertuccio.

"Yes indeed," says I, upon which he had some motion to strike me, but thought better of it.

"Soldiers answering officers," says he, "should say 'your honor'—Your Honor."

"Aye, and the way to hold a sword is by the blunt end," I told him. At which, fortunately for both of us, he laughed.

"Out of a command?" says he, and when I nodded: "Ah—these are cursed hard times. Until I got this job a week ago, split me if I'd drawn sword for pay in fourteen months."

"Whose service are we in now?" I asked, undoing my stomacher. Food

had been scarce lately, so I'd laced it tight; but now camp-fires were beginning to twinkle and I was fain to make room for all possible soup.

"Name's Ugo di Fontesecca—one of them hill-lords," says Bertuccio; and as I turned my thumb up and raised my eyebrows, turned his thumb down and shook his head. 'Twas a method then used, Your Grace, by free-lances when discussing the nobility; ears being everywhere and the gentry touchy.

"And the enemy?"

"Lord of this place—Ercole, his name is; queer duck, by all accounts. Had an old father that flung him out ten years agone; God know'th where he's been since; anyhow—old man dies last autumn, and back he comes to his inheritance. I don't know—they say he's a wizard."

"Wizard?" says I, crossing myself in case. "Why?"

Bucca laughed like a dog barking.

"Oh—country chatter; anyone yokels know not all about, they think must be kin to the devil. Then again he's tall and pale and reads books and hath eyes that seem to look through you—so they say; and last winter Ugo had a man stab him and the blow failed. Chain-mail, o' course; but Ugo said witchcraft, hoping the Church would take it up. But no; so out he comes with this will of the late lord's, leaving him the county; and o' course Ercole says it's a forgery and that's why we're fighting."

"A will, eh?" says I, raising thumb and eyebrows as before.

"Aye, a testament," says Bertuccio, turning his thumb down as before and laughing. "But who 'a God's name cares, so long as the soup's good? Dish it forth, Giuseppe."

However, this Giuseppe had a message, that the lieutenant should go forthwith to my lord Ugo's tent; and when he came back he could hardly eat for swearing.

"Those peasants," says he, after guiding me as it were round heaven and hell and introducing most of the saints and devils by name. "Those peasants thou led, scorch-whiskers! What's thy real name, eh?"

I told him, and it seemed he had heard of me; at all events, he spoke politely thenceforth.

"Look you, Luigi: I spend two days combing the countryside and hearing women wailing—aye, and dodging the rocks they threw at me!—just to raise these louts for his lordship; and thou know'st they've saved money for him this day. Aye, and there's two hundred of 'em left yet; and what's he say? Why, we're not to use 'em."

"Not use 'em?"

"No! 'A cursed me up and down and asked who was going to pick the grapes next month, if we killed off all the peasants."

"Who's going to hold the county for him, if he gets *us* all slain?"

"Ah—that's what I asked him; but oons! Caradosso, 'a's past reason; said that if I lost many more men, armored or no, he'd stretch my neck for me. Just because he's made a hole in a wall, he thinks—ooh, santissima!"

THE SOUP was boiling and, having got his thumb in it, Bertuccio was off again. While he swore—which, what with the scald and the scolding, may have been ten minutes—I stared through the darkness at Castello Nero, on whose battlements cressets were now flaring; and when he ceased, had a small plan to propose.

"*I'm* lieutenant here," he growled, rapping himself on the breastplate.

"At present," says I, stroking my throat.

He considered this gesture.

"Well?" says he at last.

" 'Tis a little risky, but it worked at Struma; and, win or lose, 'twill save thee from hanging. Better climb a rope than stretch one, as the saying is."

"Climb a rope? Battlements, ye mean? Am I to take the place single-handed?"

"No, no. Six men. You and I and four more; there must be some good private cut-throats in the ranks."

"Seeing that we emptied the jail at Fontesecca," says Bertuccio, putting down his bowl. "Well? We swarm up a rope to the battlements—having first lodged the said rope—and what then? The sentries?"

"Watch the cressets," says I. "When one dies down for lack of fuel—that means the sentry's drowsy; I throw a rope up with a loop on't—"

"So easy!" says Bertuccio. "Ha-ha!"

Restraining my impulses until such time as I should be his captain, I told him the trick took learning, but that I knew it; having studied with a horse-farmer in the south.

"Well then?"

"Then one of us goes up and kills the sentry; takes his helm and halberd—body armor's all the same—strolls along to meet the next sentry and kills *him*. By this time, another of us is atop, and there's another helm and halberd for him to wear; and so on."

"Art joking with me, Caradosso?"

"When the six of us are up," says I, possibly laying hand to my dagger, as he had, "four of us trot downstairs, sir; overpower the gate guard—ye know gate-guards, always dozing—another two trot upstairs, cut the ropes and down comes the drawbridge. That crash signals the couple of hundred men we've had waiting; in they frolic and the place is ours."

Regarding me closely, as one doth a madman, Bertuccio now saw my brow wrinkle.

"Aha!" says he. "A difficulty assails thee!"

I shook my head.

"'Tis but that—at Struma—as captain—of course I headed those troops; the two hundred. I threw the rope and then—look you, Lieutenant, we must have someone trustworthy in that post. For if the men are seen before the bridge falls, or if they delay when it comes down, behold us six cut into catsmeat. Your Honor must appoint—"

"Who commands here, *Captain?*" says Bucca, spraddling himself.

"You, Lieutenant."

"Very well, then; I can work out mine own plans, thank'ee. Now, as I say, there's no need for two officers in six men; thou'rt the rope-thrower, so pick thy five fellows and be ready."

I'd been wondering how to make him think my scheme was his own and so favor it. No trouble at all, no trouble at all.

"*I* shall command the storming party," says he, getting up and frowning on me. "And mark you—fail me not!"

He was going away without fixing a time for the enterprise when I called him back, and—Poor Bertuccio! Not a word would I say against him; an excellent lieutenant was he to me for forty years thereafter; brave, faithful, untiring; truly as fine a fellow as never had a brain.

WE SETTLED on four hours before dawn; and at that time behold me, across the moat from a dimming cresset, casting for a crenellation of the battlements while my chosen five looked on. I forget their names, but they were admirable comrades; three bravos in disgrace and two thieves. All had agreed with the proverb about climbing ropes; what was more, they could climb—we'd had a trial under a tree-bough, with the provost-marshal there as judge.

Nevertheless, they liked not this work overmuch, especially when the rope would fall back into the moat with a splash. It sounded like the crack of doom to me, too, but I dissembled and bade them put their knives in their mouths to stop their teeth chattering. I did it, too—the taste of cold steel is very fortifying—and sure enough, I caught the crenellation at the very next try.

"Up, bully-boy!" I said to one of the bravos; and, after I'd spat my knife into my hand again, up he went. Proved a good workman, too; hardly two minutes had gone by, when his head appeared at an embrasure with the sentry's morion on't; and so the others followed him at due intervals. I went last, for various reasons, and, having none to hold the rope taut for me, had a devil of a climb of it—soaked to the skin and with newts in my hair.

And I'd just reached the battlements when, from about the fifth sentry-station toward the gate-house, there came a yell and—what was worse—the bang of an arquebus; and then—though I heard it imperfectly as I ran—the sound of the whole fort waking up.

"The gate! The drawbridge!" I roared.

"Drawbridge first! Hurry for your necks!"

They were accustomed to that kind of haste, as I have hinted; but I doubt they ever ran from catchpoll as they did from me. The two thieves went up the stair to the bridge-gallery like rabbits; the bravos did well as far as the steps down to the court—but, catching up with them and looking over the parados, I saw they were stopped there, by soldiers coming up.

Well—the gate had to be opened; that was certain. And a broken leg's better than a broken neck—thinking which, I hoped devoutly for neither and dropped twenty feet off the wall. That brought me just to the back of the press that was assaulting my bravos; I took a sword from the nearest assailant—leaving my knife in him by way of exchange—and thus armed, bolted my bodily best for the gate-house.

Aha! Gate-guards! Did I not know the breed?

Had I, in my old age, a castle to defend (which God forbid; I have trouble enough keeping caterpillars off my lettuces)—I would never, Your Grace, permit the barring of the main-gate. This is not to say I would abolish fortifications; a cavalryman by birth I have nevertheless fought in most modes and have oft been glad to have twelve or fourteen feet of masonry between me and an enemy; especially since these dirty stink-pots of artillery came in. But, sire, fortifications can be scaled, they can be out-flanked or undermined or taken from the rear—I knew a painter once, Leonardo his name was, who said soldiers might have wings fitted some day and light on our battlements like birds!—and then woe to the fools who have gone to sleep behind their ramparts and demi-lunes. Aye—the only defense against human depravity is human vigilance; nothing dulls vigilance so much as the belief of security—mandragora's nothing to it. And gate-guards, having bolts, bars and thick walls ever before them, are the least vigilant of men.

Witness these at Castello Nero!

When I burst into their room—sword in hand, and the courtyard behind me in outrageous uproar—two of them were asleep in chairs by the fireplace; other two were playing some kind of game with dice; one was counting his pay in the light of a candle and the sixth, lounging toward the doorway with his gorget open, yawned as he asked me what the devil was the matter!

Even when he saw me take the key from the lock, this dolt did not awake; not until I had sprung outside, slammed the door, turned the key and prisoned the whole half-dozen of them, did he begin to bawl.

I WAS laughing as I drew first the footbolts of the great gate, and as I twirled the pivot-bars that locked one half on't to the other. By the time I had got the socket-posts back, I was some little grim—the drawbridge was not down yet; and if my two thieves upstairs had come to grief, all this (and my mother's labor-pains besides) would have been for nothing. But as I thrust the last bar clear, down came the bridge indeed—with a crash that shook the ground I stood on—and I laughed again.

Almost for the last time.

For as I turned to help my bravos in the courtyard, whom should I see rushing at me but his lordship of Castello Nero, bent on murder! Aye—even without Bertuccio's description I should have known him for a noble; so billowy was his bed-gown and so confident was he of nailing my vile flesh to the gate.

I stepped aside politely, hoping he would drive the point into the woodwork and let me stun him; but no—he stopped his rush very neatly on the left foot, performed a demi-volta for all the world as though he knew what he was doing and lashed out with a *rinverso tondo* that nigh had me beheaded. Aye, indeed; had he not held his blade so clumsy, sticking up at an angle rigidly instead of moving horizontally according to the rules, I might have thought him a real swordsman and felt forced to do him a mischief.

As it was, I played for time, even letting him force me backward, away from the gate.

Any moment now, methought, Bertuccio and his lads would be breaking

in; meantime, holding his lordship at blade's length, I had opportunity to examine him; and a magical looking person he was for a fact—very white-skinned; with black hair in ringlets, dark hair and red mouth.

Which, to my regret, he now opened in a roar that amazed me. A corporal of cavalry could not have done a whit better.

"Ho, dastards!" shouts my lord to his folk in the courtyard. "The gate! The gate!"

But mercifully they heard him not. I wanted to take him alive, you see, for my promotion.

"*Ssh*, sir!" says I therefore, driving him deeper into the archway—I had no fancy for pikemen coming upon me from behind. "Just a moment now and—"

"The gate!" he yells, pressing on me with a passado so that to humor him I must give ground. "The gate, rogues! The gate!"

I was just about to abandon ambition and stick him like a pig, when as Heaven sees me, my sword flew out of my hand and clattered on the cobbles three yards away.

What would Your Grace have thought in such a circumstance? Was it possible to believe that I, Caradosso, had been disarmed by a lordling? Is it even now imaginable? No; especially since mine adversary, instead of running me through, lowered his point as in surprise. As for me—though I heard clamor and footsteps behind me, I was standing petrified with amaze when the great gate burst open and in poured Bertuccio and his men.

Oons, sire, they were whiskery ugly rogues, but at that moment, as they knocked my lord into my arms and threw us down and trampled on us, I would not have exchanged them for a regiment of archangels. After the first rush, I picked up his lordship, stacked him unconscious in a corner; knocked down a couple of rogues in the second company who thought I was a defender; picked up my sword and joined the mêlée. It was hot for some minutes but —after I had climbed the stair and discouraged a couple of arbalestriers on the battlements—it quieted down.

NOW, I knew, his lorship Ugo would ride in, to take seisin of all the bloody work we'd done for him; and 'twas time for a poor soldier with his way to make, to be about his business. Wherefore, smearing myself with some red stuff I chanced to find on a step—my three bravos had been slain there, and marvellous hacked about—I picked up my late noble adversary from his corner and when Ugo rode in, presented myself staggering, with his lordship over my shoulder.

"Ha!" says Ugo, staring down at me; a sallow man he was, with hook nose and eyes that glittered in the torch-light much after the manner of a rat's.

He dismounted, swaggered over to me and pulled up his rival's head by the hair.

"Ha!" says he again, grinning with a lot of broken teeth. "Dead, soldier?"

"I think not, Your Grace."

"Ha, well—"

It had been a hot, oppressive day; and at this moment it broke in a flash of lightning, that lit the courtyard up all blue and a peal of thunder that shook the firmament. I leaped, it is true, in my skin—I'd been under fire by culverins earlier in the day, and was then not used to such devilries; but on Lord Ugo the flash and noise produced effects beyond all bounds.

He shrank back and visibly trembled; crossed himself and seemed like to swoon. For awhile, too, he appeared to lose his voice; pointed at my burden with a hand that quivered and tried to give orders with lips that made no sound.

"Sorcery!" says he at last, in a high, cracked tone. And oons, as he said it the welkin flared again and a thunder-clap shook the very turrets.

"Away with him!" screams Ugo. "Away with him! Dungeon! Double irons!"

And so 'twas done; not by me, thank God! (who always looks after his own)—but by Bertuccio Bucca, who at this moment stepped forward, all officiousness, to take charge of the prisoner. O he was an old hand at the business, thank God, was Bertuccio; he knew, thank God, how much promotion depends on merit and how much on step-

ping into the torch-light at the proper moment.

Why am I so devout, all of a sudden?

Because, Your Grace, having taken and shackled and locked up my lord Ercole according to orders, of course 'twas Bertuccio who had to bring the prisoner to Lord Ugo's cabinet next morning.

Or, I should rather say, to arrive in the said cabinet alone, with face deathly pale and hands twitching.

"Well?" says my lord, starting up from behind his table.

"Gone!" says Bertuccio hoarsely.

"What?"

Haggard as a corpse, Ugo stepped over to poor Bucca and struck him heavily in the face. "What the devil—ye mean—the prisoner hath escaped?"

Bertuccio, all staggered up against the wall—quite forgetful of his dignity and dagger—could do no more than nod.

His lordship turned those rat-eyes of his on me; his face, pale under its sallowness, seemed green.

"Lieutenant," says he, pointing at me, "take me this traitor and hang him from the battlements. At once!"

I REACHED forward and yanked Bertuccio's sword from the loops; sorry to earn promotion just this way, but philosophic, philosophic.

As I did so, his countenance turned from white to red. Hanging, even in prospect, hath a remarkable effect on the complexion.

"Look you!" says he, pushing me aside. "Look you, Lord Ugo! Hang me if ye will—a good servant—by God, you'll need such soon enough—and do thee no good—go look at the cell—ask the men outside there—"

"Come, Bertuccio," says I, taking him by the arm and speaking soothingly; which seemed to calm him a little.

"Very well," says Bucca, breathing through his nose very hard, "but ere I go, I'll say this; I locked my lord into two pair of fetters and chained him to the wall; and double-locked the door of a cell forty feet above the moat—there's no dungeon—and left three men on guard outside the door, and today—"

"Today he's gone!" shouts Ugo. "Lieutenant—"

"Aye, he's gone," shouts Bertuccio, louder still, "with the door still locked and bolted on the outside, and the window-bars whole and his fetters lying on the floor still locked and the key in my girdle!"

He took it forth and flung it on the table.

Zounds, if Ugo had been pale the night before, he now turned ashy. I had some little rising of the neck-hair, myself.

"Ye lie!" says my lord under his breath; whereat Bucca folded his arms and stared at him without speaking. "Is it—was it so indeed?"

"Your Grace hath but to go and see. Ask the men. As for me—I'm hanged; and well out of the way of warlocks, say I; maybe your lordship will see my ghost. Lieutenant—lead on."

Ugo sank into a chair and put forth a shaking hand.

"No—no—look you," says he, and fumbled with his chin. "Look you, Bucca—thou'st a good master in me. I've had bad news this morning—bad news—that storm last night—there was hail with it in the hills and the whole vine-crop is destroyed. What make you of that, ha?"

Bertuccio said nothing. Aha, he lacked ingenuity, did Bucca; but he knew when he had the upper hand.

"Half the cattle have been killed in the fields, too," says my lord. "Didst ever hear of such a thing? Eh?"

Still we commoners stood in silence; which seemed to bear heavily on the nerves of his worship. Suddenly he sprang out of his chair and smacked his hand flat on the table.

"That devil hath betwitched us! 'A's laid a curse on the place!" he cried.

Bertuccio waited some few moments; then sniffed and wiped his nose on the back of his hand.

"Want him killed?" he asked, very disrespectful and matter-of-fact.

Rat-eyes fixed in his head, Ugo nodded.

"Cost your lordship a hundred ducats," says Bucca.

His lordship licked his lips. "Agreed. See Valdifiore. And mark you—fail not!"

Valdifiore was treasurer, I guessed.

"If so be he hath flesh susceptible to sword-cut," says Bertuccio, bowing, "your honor may expect his head at an early date. If he can resolve himself into a smell of brimstone, of course—"

"Fail not!" says Ugo.

"*A rivederci,* signore!" says Bucca with an airy motion of the sword-hand.

But, mounted and at the gateway of the castle, he had another word to say to me.

"I've no taste for working for a forger and a robber under a curse," says he. "Joy of thy lieutenancy and—farewell, Luigi Caradosso!"

II

SO OFF he went, the rogue, the thief, the common deserter; and I am frank to tell Your Grace that I should have liked very well to go with him. But the Power that makes history had me in its grasp—as, at my present age of eighty, I see it hath all of us, down to the very humblest—and so I stayed. I damned Bucca some little; grumbled some little more at my quarters and the quality of the local wine; carried a crucifix on the night-rounds lest there *should* be curses in the air—but stayed.

For had I gone with Bertuccio then, how could I have met him five years later, commanding the enemy cavalry at Formo? And had some stranger—possibly quick-witted—opposed me there, how should I have dared dismount my men and make that flanking movement through the forest? And had I not thus won that battle, what would have become of a whole bevy of lordships, each dependent on the one for which I was then fighting?

I beg pardon; I wander; the excuse being that at fourscore one sees every man, every event in this world to be so close-linked with every other, that 'tis very hard to say where any story ends and any other begins. Whence the slander that old men are garrulous . . .

I return to my subject; Your Grace hath asked my experience of curses. Well—had I gone with Bertuccio then, I should have had none. As it was—

An unseasonable hail-storm had ruined the crops, as I have said; a misfortune, certainly, but one that most nobles—most common farmers, even—have taken in their stride.

Not so my lord Ugo; oons, shall I ever forget escorting him about the countryside while he inquired into the size of those hail-stones, what time of night they'd started to fall, whether they had been bigger than usual, or black and smelling of sulphur, and God knows what rubbish besides?

So intent was he on these inquiries—mark again how one thing leads to another!—that he crossed his own boundaries into Naldi; and, as luck would have it, came face to face with Cesare of that county; a lord of the stiff old kind.

"I had thought," says he, after Ugo had stuttered forth our mission, "that perchance your lordship had discovered some will or testament giving your grace title to *my* poor lands. Since that is happily not so, permit me to lead your lordship back to his own territory."

Which he did; and I thought it was the insult that made Ugo ride pale and silent. But when we were alone again, it was still of those smashed vines he spoke.

"Didst see, Caradosso?" asks my lord. "His vineyards are of one piece with mine; yet mine are ruined and his are untouched. Eh? Eh?"

"His are on the south side of the hill, sir; yours are on the east. The storm came from the east, as I recall."

But he seemed not to hear me, and when he turned those small black eyes on me, not to see me either; his senses were, so to speak, turned inward. Which may be the symptoms of a man under a curse; would Your Highness chance to be so afflicted?

"Didst hear him accuse me of forging the title to Castello Nero?"

I jumped in my saddle.

"Sir?"

"You shall be my witness before the Council of Nobles," says Ugo. "I am not thus to be slandered and belied; he shall ask my pardon, by God!"

Before I could come out of my bewilderment at which, he was muttering: "Bucca is a good man, eh, Lieutenant?

He will—do what he went to do, won't 'a?"

I said he would, and that was no lie; he'd gone to spend my lord's ducats at the first pot-house out of his lordship's domains. And I wished more than ever that I were with him.

"'Tis not murder, to kill a curser; there's good Bible for't. Ask any priest. We are not to suffer a witch to live, much less a magician. Ask my chaplain."

"Sir," says I, promotion ever in mind, "I was brought up in a convent."

I thought this might lead him from his brooding; but fegs!—he was as attached to it as a dog is to a bone.

"Ye were?" says he, looking at me human-like for an instant; then his eyes turned inward again. "Then who knows where this Ercole was for ten years before his father died? I've heard there are black monasteries, Caradosso; regular academies of black art; wandering at fifteen years old, what more likely than he'd join one? Look you—when I told him of this will of his father's, leaving Castello Nero to me—I mind he sat there never looking up, drawing figures on a bit of parchment; pentagrams, I warrant you; abracadabra. And at the end, he got up, and did he storm and rage at me like a proper man? No; mark what he did—he said 'God will not prosper thee in this, my lord Ugo'—*and threw the paper in the fire.*"

He looked at me, horror in his eyes.

"Now I think back, meseems that parchment burned with a blue flame; but no matter—what befell the very next day? My little son fell in the moat at Fontesecca, and was saved only by the grace of God and the hook of the sentry's halberd. Eh, Caradosso? What think'st thou of that?"

Well, I crossed myself to please him, sire; but after all I was not the one cursed, if curse there was, and so I could reflect that whereso there are boys and water, one must naturally fall into the other.

I SAID as much to old Valdifiore when I met him on the battlements that evening; but he too appeared to have fears upon his mind.

"I pray heaven we have no trouble with the Council of Nobles," says he, combing his long white beard with his nails. "I trust the forces are in good fettle, Lieutenant."

"Better ask the captain about that," says I.

"He's sick," says the treasurer. "Came down this morning with a fever. This cursed marshy country! And these damned bog-nobles—we might better have stayed in the hills, where we belong. I feel but sickly myself—and the worse for this evening's work. We should be stepping softly—and here I am writing a complaint to the Council! Alas!"

"What about?"

"Is't true," says the old man, "that Cesare de Naldi accused my lord—of—of forgery?"

"Not that I heard."

"Ye were there! Said he not that we'd—he'd—falsified the will—the title to Castello Nero?"

"No."

He staggered, put his hand to his brow.

"But his lordship—I've made complaint to the Council that Cesare thus accused him, and—"

"Fear not," says I. "Oons, Messer Secretary—even if such a charge were made; even if my lord of Naldi proved it—hath not our lord this county in possession? He'd but feign to be amazed—hang the poor devil that did the writing for him—"

"There's a curse on this place," says old Valdifiore; backing away as though I'd been reaching for his neck with a noose. "I'll—I'll not stay here longer. No!"

But he did; because that very night he came down with the fever—it smote him in his quarters, while he was packing; and the day after that, half my soldiers were in the same plight. What's more to the point—a week later I joined them in burning and chilling and tossing and raving.

Witchcraft! Sire—one day I scorned the idea, and the next, with the miasma in my bones, I was by no means so sure. Your Grace is a hillman, as I was, but hath had the fortune to stay there; which I had not; it is therefore unim-

aginable to Your Highness that a man should wake up (as I did) to find himself wandering on the sentry-walk in shirt and sword; should feel himself, at high noon, plunged into a bath of ice, and the next moment, by the feel of it, hung over a blazing furnace and, between these sensations, see with his bodily eyes great stone walls and towers come rushing at him, then go away to a great distance and come rushing at him again.

I even found myself with an incurable thirst for *water*—sire, sire, it was terrifying.

I was on wine again, but still very weak, when it came time for his lordship to attend the Council of Nobles; moreover, instead of hoping for trouble as a soldier should, I found myself all a-tremble behind Ugo's chair, trusting that all might be peaceable. On the way over I had tried to tell his lordship in what state the fever had left us—ten dead, and those most of them squad-leaders; and the rest mighty thin and discouraged, as I was myself.

I doubt, though, whether he even heard me; I remember he flapped his hand and said aye, aye, but the Count di Naldi must eat his words.

TO MY dismay, he said this again at the Council, ere ever his complaint had been brought up; whereat old Cesare looked around the board and said: "What words?"

"The words accusing me—the words spoken before my captain here—my lieutenant—and another common fellow—several others—accusing me that I—forged and counterfeited the will of his late lordship—giving me Castello Nero in despite of his lordship's son. Which I will show—the said son—away in some black monastery, studying magic—yes, magic, my lords—"

"My lords—" says old Cesare, getting up; and it was to him they gave their attention. He was a fat barrel of a man who had been a condottiere long ago, and at seventy-odd still wore the manners of the breed. "My lords, here is some little confusion. Perchance the fever they have down there at Castello Nero hath afflicted his lordship."

"Nay, nay! says Ugo, grinning. "No, sirs. I have taken measures—certain herbs gathered at midnight—"

Your Grace's grandfather, who then presided at the Council, looked at him askance.

"Your lordship was saying . . .?" says he to Cesare.

"Well, here's the matter, your grace; there was my lord Ugo on my land; I asked had he *found* some document giving him the right to be there. I recall no thought of forgery, much less word of it; what gentleman would think of such a villainy? Moreover—these common fellows he mentions as witnesses—there's one of 'em behind his chair and another behind mine; both old soldiers, if I mistake not, and will speak the truth. Hey, Giovanni?"

His guard-captain saluted.

" 'Twas as your honor says."

The old man cocked his eye at me in turn; but I had no time to answer—even had I thought the truth expedient; which I did not.

"Liar and libeller!" shouts Ugo.

In an instant, the lords about the table were on their feet; some crying shame because of Cesare's age, others because of the dignity of the Council, but all crying shame; except of course Your Grace's sainted grandfather, who never took sides until sure which was going to win.

As for Cesare himself, he stood silent for some moments, staring at lord Ugo as if in wonderment. I daresay no one had ever called him liar to his face before; I should not have chosen to do it myself.

"Do I understand your worship?" says he, in the voice of an old bloodhound. I saw him reach one hand behind him and wriggle the fingers; meaning that he wanted a sword. These little arguments were common at Council meetings, and this gesture was well-known; but Ugo could not signal decently to me; no, no; he must turn with his face all livid and tear my sword out of its loops as though he were placing me under arrest.

"My lords—my lords!" bleats the President of the Council, who for a wolf had the sheepiest voice ever I heard. "My lords, consider—"

I could see *him* considering—what profit he might make of this brawl—but Ugo was beyond consideration. In a moment, moreover, he was beyond the table from me; facing Cesare, who now kicked over his chair and stepped sideways to meet him.

"Be warned, young man!" rumbles Cesare out of his barrel chest.

"Be damned to you!" says Ugo.

"The chair—the chair!" I called to Ugo's guard-captain; meaning that he should pick it up and get it out of the way; but he did not hear me and—aie, aie! His fate, who can avoid? Before I could call out again, their lordships were at in-and-out, with such fury that it was one's life-purchase to approach them; I do not mean that their sword-play coveved much space—indeed, Ugo's was poor, thin stuff and Cesare seemed content to stand still and parry, like an old rock in a tide-rip; but when amateurs fight, 'tis well for professionals on either side to stand well clear, their arms folded in plain sight.

THEIR lordships of the Council drew away and stood gazing—all except Pietro II, who had his grief-stricken face in his hands and was watching through his fingers; and indeed, that battle was worth some attention. Not Ugo's side on't, though 'twas he was attacking, and displaying all the tricks of the trade; nay, 'twas old Cesare's performance that was the marvel. Your slash-and-stab swordsman will assert that killing an adversary is the be-all and end-all of swordplay; but as anyone who hath had to take prisoners will avouch, there is far higher art in sparing an opponent while keeping oneself alive.

And 'twas visible from the beginning that Cesare wished not to kill my lord; whether because he thought him mad, or because he had a son of Ugo's age, or because his own years had made him merciful, I know not. I do know that he could have spitted my lord at least twice in the first dozen passados, and made no move to do it; just stood there on his stumpy legs, smiling and turning everything aside with wrist-work.

Their lordships who were not fighting could have no notion of the merit of his performance; but they saw that smile—so different from the devil's look on the face of Ugo—and they began to murmur: "Shame, shame! An old man—"

Cesare beat off an attack in quinto, spat on the floor and reassured them.

"Fear not, gentles," says he, "—ah!—"

As he spoke, Ugo had ceased his attack, leaped backward out of range of riposte and dropped his point. That Cesare over-looked the glitter in his eyes, shuttling about in fury, I cannot believe; but the fact remains that he too let down his guard—in which instant, Ugo was forward and at him again.

Since Your Grace is not a swordsman, I may say that while a break is to the advantage of the attacker, giving him a moment to catch his breath, it is otherwise for the defender, unless he know how long the pause is to be. Taken unaware, he hath no time to re-establish himself; his first parry will be hasty and its successors out of timing—he is an eye-blink too late at the beginning, and each successive parade will put him further and further behind.

Cesare knew this; I think he knew, God rest him, most things pertaining to the sword; so now, when Ugo leaped upon him, he made no motion with his blade—just leaped aside and came on guard as my lord of Castello Nero rushed past him. He could have run the trickster through from side to side in that moment, but he did not; just stood there wagging his head from side to side as if in reprobation of the device.

The murmuring among the lords grew louder, but Ugo took no heed. He tried a back-hand cut at Cesare, and when that failed spun on his heel and drove twice at the old man's knees. Again, still smiling and wagging his white head, Cesare gave ground—of a sudden I saw alarm cross his face—I knew what was the matter—I shouted—but the next moment he had tripped over the chair he had flung down, and gone sprawling on his back.

And, sire—the next moment after that, God help us all—my master had driven his sword—*my* sword—clean through the old man so that I heard the point grate on the flagstone.

He loosed the hilt immediately, did Ugo; and there was a clash as Cesare writhed over and brought the blade flat against the floor. I could just see him from where I stood; he brought up his old hands, clutching; he pulled the sword out of the wound, flung it from him, rolled over and lay still.

"So!" says Ugo, standing over him white-faced. "So, my lords!"

They stared at him in silence, as if they had been turned to stone. He was in a white sweat now; and, I remember, put his hands up to his cheeks and pressed the nails into them, so that the under-lids of his eyes showed their red lining.

As for his eyes themselves—

OLD CESARE'S captain was picking up his sword; picked up mine, too, but I did not want it; no, no; not any more, though it had cost me nine crowns; not that blade.

"Let no man henceforth—" says Ugo in a trembling voice. He took down his hands from his face, and there were five red spots on either cheek, as though he'd been clawed by the devil.

No one spoke to him; but young Lodovico della Fortezza turned to Giangiacomo Rinaldi that stood beside him and said: "Would it be safe, think you, to turn our backs on my lord?"

And at the word, the whole assembly did so; except Your Grace's grandsire, still sitting in his presidential chair. He had his hands down from his face now, too, and those red eyes of his fixed on Ugo.

"I think," says he, "it would be well for your lordship to withdraw. Lieutenant—the door for his highness."

Out we went . . .

Pho! Your Grace, I make sacrifices to write these chronicles; I sit here, fifty years after leaving that council-chamber, and my stomach quakes as I think on't—that departure and the long, silent ride home.

Home swordless and in shame to that stolen castle, with men ghost-like with fever presenting arms as we rode in—and old Valdifiore dying upstairs, someone told us.

I see my lord now, standing in the courtyard; afraid to go to his old secretary; more afraid still to let him die alone.

"Come, Caradosso," he said at last; and led the way through the long, eerie galleries to the old man's room.

Darkness had fallen by this time; there were two candles by the bedside, and in their light it was visible that Valdifiore had not long to live. Indeed, at first I thought he was gone already; but as my lord laid a hand to his wrist, he opened his eyes.

There was no recognition in them, either of his lordship or of me; but then he looked beyond us and seemed to see someone he knew, who terrified him.

With a cry, he sat upright in his bed, white beard streaming like the cobwebs that hung down from the groined roof, and flung out both his hands.

"Mercy—mercy!" he shrieked. "I confess—I wrote—but 'twas lord Ugo here—curse him, good lord Ercole, not me, a poor old—ah Dio—keep away—a poor old man—mercy—mercy—"

He shrank away, clutched hands to his throat as if someone were strangling him; rattled and fell back dead.

I had looked over my shoulder when he pointed there, and seen that we were alone in the room, the three of us; yet at this moment an icy Presence seemed to pass between me and Ugo—that I'll swear to after all these years. Maybe it was the soul of Valdifiore on its way to judgment; maybe—

"Caradosso!" says my lord.

His voice was hoarse, but calmer; this crowning horror had steadied him.

As for me, I could neither speak nor salute.

Somewhere down the corridor, a door slammed as though someone had departed in fury.

"Caradosso! My lord Ercole hath been here—in apparition!"

I crossed myself.

"He hath strangled Valdifiore! Ye saw it!"

Mine own breathing sounded to me like the panting of a horse. That was a very ill room to be in, with the old man's chin sticking up so from his sheets.

"Phantasms of the dead cannot harm

the living," says my lord. "Bucca hath not found him. He must be found—and killed!"

The gates of heaven seemed to be opening to me. Ugo was to propose that I ride forth—as Bertuccio had—to blessed, blessed freedom; away from this sink of sorcery.

The use of my limbs returned. I saluted.

"Wilt do't?" says Ugo; and as I nodded, stared into my face with those glittering eyes. "Wilt be faithful to thy mission—eh?"

I saluted again.

He stooped and picked up something that had fallen from Valdifiore's hands in the last struggle.

It was a crucifix, and he held it out to me.

"Sir—sir—" I stammered, aghast, "the task may prove impossible."

"To the best of thine ability," says Ugo through his teeth, "thou'lt seek Ercole and try to kill him. Does that suit they conscience, Captain?"

My mouth was dry past speaking.

Ugo pushed the crucifix into my hands. "Then swear!"

III

WHAT should I have done? Refused, says Your Grace; and rightly, too; not a doubt on't. And so I would, had God in his wisdom made *me* Duke of Rometia or even endowed me with an uncuttable throat. As it was—and seeing Ugo pull from his breath the guard-whistle—I swore as he desired me.

Then I went and got bountifully drunk in my quarters and, by what appeared next morning, must have ridden forth at random that same night.

I awoke, I mean to say, with aching head and a mouth like the floor of a menagerie, some forty miles north of Castello Nero; lying on the table of an inn I was, to be exact.

The inn-keeper was standing near, hands on hips looking down at me.

"Well, sirrah?" says I, "didst never see a gentleman drunk before?"

"Many a score. But never one exactly like your honor."

I sat up.

"So? And what about my honor was unusual?"

"Well, sir, under favor—"

"No favor at all," says I. "Cozen me not, good tapster. I'm no gentleman really; just a damned soul."

"Yes, sir. So your honor was pleased to tell us last night; and for all the priest could say—"

"The priest?"

"I beg pardon—the friar your worship brought with you."

"*I*—brought a friar?"

"If your honor recalls. To give you spiritual advice. About murdering the gentleman."

My heart went cold within me.

"Murder a gentleman? What gentleman?"

"Nay, your honor did not specify; beyond that he was a wizard."

I got off the table. Nowadays, of course, I know that wine atop swamp-fever may make a man say anything; but then I was not so knowledgeable and thought I had been bewitched indeed.

"Where is this monk?"

"Why, he's at breakfast, your honor. He—"

I went into the next room, and there he was indeed; a fat little man with a swivel eye, who for some time perceived me not, so busy was he with his sausage and raw onion.

"Good day, Captain!" says he at last; and, sitting down across the table from him, I thought I might have picked a worse to rave to.

And seemingly he was of the same opinion. For: "Luck was with thee last night," he said; and, knowing he had not my reason for so thinking (which was, that he seemed a comfortable, godless kind of monk) I asked him why.

"Why," says he, reaching for a piece of cheese, "because most men o' my cloth would have discouraged ye. Or at very best, done ye no good. Whereas I—"

The sight of the cheese was too much for him. He filled his mouth with the stuff.

"Whereas thou. . . ?"

He chewed his mouthful, swallowed

it and said: " 'Tis my lord Ercole thou'rt after, is't not? Sometime of Castello Nero?"

"Did I say so?"

He grinned and tried to take another bite; but I restrained him.

"What's it to thee?" I demanded.

"Nothing," says the monk, "except that—I know where he is."

I stared at him.

"Yes, Captain; I know where he is; a damned perilous place too, and one thou'd never win to without me. So much I tell thee gratis; now ask me not how or why I know, nor try to beat down my price."

"Price?"

"Twenty crowns; so I told the other soldier, and he mocked me, the fool; so I tell thee. And if thee thinks that's too much for a nobleman's head—why, I'll go back and wait for the next bravo my lord sends forth. He will—and soon; the curse rides him hard, he-he!"

"Didst wait for me?"

"Of course. At the pot-house a mile from the castle—ye got drunk there. So did the other soldier. So will the next."

"Without doubt," says I, surveying him, "thou'rt the damnedest friar ever I saw."

He bowed, as to a compliment, and again stuffed his mouth with food.

"Where then is his lordship?"

He bolted the mouthful.

"Where are the twenty crowns?"

I tapped myself on the bosom.

He tapped himself on the head.

"No, no, no, no, Captain. Look you: the rule of my Order binds me to poverty. Knowledge is all I may possess—and am I to give that away, a hungry man like me?"

"I'd fain know how thou came by this knowledge," says I, glowering. "Guides to black monasteries are like to have lived in such themselves. Ha—have I touched thee?"

FOR the moment, methought I had; then I saw that the quaking of his flesh was too evident to be real, and that he was making sport of me. I was laying hand to my dagger when he leaned across the table and breathed garlic on me.

"Nay, Captain," says he, very conspiratorial, "the truth's worse. Apprehending pursuit, my lord Ercole left me behind to intercept followers like yourself and bring them to him. Sssh!"

He spoke so seriously, and looked so fearfully over his shoulder, that for all my headache I could not forbear to laugh.

"And when thou'st delivered me," I asked, keeping up the joke, "what will his lordship do? Turn me into a black goat, belike?"

"Sssh! I doubt if thou can expect that for twenty crowns. Goats come high. . . . Corpses are cheap, though."

He spoke this soberly, with his lip thrust out.

"True," I said. "I've made some few in my time, with little profit."

"This—this is no ordinary lord ye hunt. Mark me—"

"I do. And now," says I, getting up, "suppose you come along with me, fat brother; and when we see who turns whom into what—as between his lordship and myself—I'll pay ye according."

He did not seem much to relish the proposal.

"Of course," says I, closing a fist and examining the knuckles thereof, "if thou'st been mocking me so far, trying to deceive a poor sick man—say so now, and I'll pay thee for *that*."

"No, no!" says the monk in haste. " 'Tis but that—look you, Captain; it's a long way—"

"I pay thy lodging. Hast a horse?"

"A little pony, as the Rule commands. But—Captain, the road's very dangerous—there's freelances at work in the Romagna—Matteo il Vecchio and his band—"

"Who scarce scare me," says I, "seeing that I used to be a condottiero myself. And what shouldst thou fear? Not a freelance hath a sword long enough to reach thy vitals through that fat, and thou'd break any rope they tried to hang thee withal. Whereas—"

I stopped short of telling him how much I feared to face black magic at the end of our journey—no matter; the upshot was that he rode with me—north-

ward, on a pony stallion of scandalous tendencies; himself singing gutter songs and telling worse stories than ever I heard in a guard-room. I had hoped for some discourse from him—preferably of the comfortable kind—about cursing and suchlike, that might still my apprehensions of the work I had in hand.

But no.

"Why," says he for instance, when I told him of Ercole's escape from the dungeon, "that was no magic, Luigi; any proper wizard would scorn it. That was *my* work; listen, being private chaplain to his lordship—"

"Oh, thou wast that too, eh?"

Earlier he'd told me of fighting the French under Lodovico of Milan; of helping sack Rome with the Emperor Charles—a dozen such stories; and said he'd a coat of mail under his robe at that moment—ha-ha!

"Certainly," says he, as grave as a bishop. "Well—foreseeing trouble either with the nobles, or the peasantry—his lordship treated 'em too well, those last clods—of course his grace arranged—though 'twas I designed it—a secret way out of the dungeon, see'st thou; a stone turning on a pivot. So that when my lord was flung in there, all I had to do was swarm up the rope you fellows had left hanging—"

"Thou'rt wasted in religion," says I. "Shouldst have been a soldier, Fra Ananias."

"Girolamo," says he, all solemn.

"And the fetters?" I asked, marvelling at his straight face.

"Oh, I had a key for those; wore it round my neck on a string—a red silk ribbon, rather—"

"Just unlocked 'em—and locked 'em again when my lord was free? Why was that?"

"To make my lord Ugo think he'd a wizard to deal with, o' course."

Oons, there was method in his madness! That would have been no bad scheme!

"And hast the key with thee at this very moment, I doubt not—in case I might doubt?" I rallied him.

"Certainly."

"Hanging round thy neck—next to that coat of mail?"

"'Tis a small, convenient key," he said; so gravely that I almost fell off my horse laughing.

So did he—and with better reason, the lying, cozening, forsworn, perjured heartless rogue; would Your Grace believe a two-legged man could do it—ride with me day by day and deceive me every minute? Yet he had done so, this Girolamo—and in the habit of a holy friar, too; and that is what he did still that night, when we stopped at an inn in the country of the condottieri and he asked had I the twenty crowns ready.

"For tomorrow," says he, sepulchral with his beak in a wine-pot, "is the day."

IT WAS craggy, ominous country thereabouts, for sure; all day we'd been passing old castles and half-wrecked convents on steep hillsides, that I'd not half liked the look of. I'd have welcomed sight of the free-lances Girolamo feared so much, to add a little flesh and blood to the landscape; 'twas too gray and stony, its skies too overcast, for me.

"I am to be conveyed to my lord Ercole?"

Girolamo nodded.

"By what means?"

"Asleep. Is't not so one always visits magicians?"

I saw there was no getting a straight answer out of him; so, though I was wearying of his waggishness: "How's this trance to be induced, maestro?" I asked.

"The wine," says the diabolical deceiver, hoisting his pot and winking at mine.

"Art to make me drunk?"

"Nay, nay," says he, drinking, "it's drugged."

And—though I scarce think Your Grace can believe in such duplicity—drugged it was; and the next thing I remember after that is waking with my lord Ercole's face swiming in a mist before me; grave, pale and black-eyed it was, as I had seen it in the flesh, but now wavering to and fro with such wizardly motion that I desired to shout and struggle—with no voice and no limbs, it seemed.

He seemed to be speaking to me—words which I could not understand, very magical they sounded, and behind him loomed the familiar, whom I knew and who was yet strange to me, as figures are in dreams.

Suddenly, this familiar vanished; there was a terrible blow to my face, as of a broadsword shearing off my features—and ach!—I was sitting up, water dripping from my head; looking at the real corporeal forms of Ercole and Girolamo; the latter with an empty pitcher in his hand.

"That's well," says his lordship, while I gasped. "I thought thee'd given him too much, Girolamo."

"Never fear!"

"Given me too much?" says I, looking about me, still too dazed to take in what I saw. This was no black monastery.

"Just enough for good twenty hours' sleep," says the false monk soothingly. Ercole had two bars of silver lace on his sleeve, I noticed then.

"Ye mean," says I, "the wine was drugged?"

This was a tent I was sitting in; and a camp-bed I was sitting on.

"Did I not say it was? Would I tell your honor a lie?"

Sire—I cannot rehearse from the beginning; suffice it that the damned rogue never had told me a lie from the time I first met him; all—chaplaincy, pivot-stone, fetter-key, you may cast back and read for yourself—had been the naked truth. Was ever such outrageous deception in the world?

But whither had he brought me with his tricks? A trumpet blew in the distance; my wits engaged, as it were, their accustomed cog-wheels; things strewn about the tent took on their proper meaning—and I knew myself to be in a camp of condottieri.

As for Ercole, those two silver stripes marked him their lieutenant.

He met my fixed gaze, nodding.

"Thou'st heard of Matteo il Vecchio? I'm Il Giovane; second in command. Have been—six years. And as thou say'st," says he, though I'd said nothing, "field-officers have small time for the black arts."

I applied my mind to thought.

"Small talent for lordship, either," says he, his brow clouding. "I'm well out of Castello Nero, Captain."

"Nevertheless—" I said.

"Why did I curse it, then? Pho—rubbish! Hail fell on the county—why not? Fever struck the garrison? Highlanders in the lowlands. My lord's son fell in the moat? So did I, fifty times between his age and fourteen. As for the killing of old Cesare—which shall be Ugo's ruin, mark me!—'twas his foul conscience drove him to that."

"Your honor mistakes me," says I, getting up and pulling down my tunic. "What I was about to say is that with due respect I am here to kill your lordship."

"You mean, you *were*. Surely—"

"I am still, sir; having taken oath to that effect; without conditions."

"Oh," says Ercole, chewing his thumbnail. "Swore you, did he? H'm."

HE SAT there considering me.

"Girolamo!"

"Sir!" says that false monk; and ow! how loud sounded the cocking of a pistol just behind me.

"Give the captain his sword."

"His *sword*, sir?"

"Lieutenant merely," says I, bowing and wondering what the devil now, "if your honor please."

"Lieutenant, eh? Then we're evenly matched for rank, and no doubt thou'll understand— Yes, his sword, fool! Give it to him. And stand not there nursing that hand-cannon. . . . Look you, Lieutenant."

I put my weapon in the loops and felt much better.

"This might," says Ercole slowly, "have been an ill meeting for both of us, Luigi; one killing and the other regretting it—for I think we're both men of indifferent good will, caught up by circumstance. As it is, I think we can accommodate each other. You've served with the free bands; you'll understand; look you; I was happy here—the troop's been all my life, and Matteo a father to me—but when this inheritance of mine fell in, I must have a fling at respectability; be a lord, wear a furred gown

and all the rest on't. Lordship! I'd better ha' jumped into a common sewer; but no matter—after eighteen months, here I'm back again having—er—lost my castle. Matteo understands such things, of course, so I have my place back; but the men—discipline hath suffered. You know?"

Ah yes, I knew. Lunk-headed lords may live on loyalty; but there's no room for failures among free-lances. Nobles play hazard with the lives of their subjects, but condottieri with their own.

"I need to make some little show of my competence," says Ercole, "and since thou'rt under this oath toward me—could we fight in public, think you?"

I bowed; adding to Girolamo that after I had dealt with my lord as in duty bound, it would be my personal pleasure to rip himself up the tripes.

"If ye do no better with his honor," says the rogue, "than ye did at Castello Nero—"

"Girolamo!" says his lordship sharply, taking his sword from the arms-stand. "Begone and tell the men what's toward. A cup of wine, Lieutenant? I trust the drug hath left no weakness of the legs."

"Your honor is very kind. No, none, I thank you."

I drank, wondering (which was unusual for me in those days) whether the next drink might find my stomach entirely free from leaks. Because if Ercole was no magician, then his disarming of me at Castello Nero (which in the meantime I'd comfortably forgot) had been a work of art. And his queer sword-hold, so far from being the sign of an apprentice, marked mastery in some school of sword-play to me unknown.

From outside came the hum of the aroused camp and the men assembling.

"Another?" says Ercole. "No? Then if you'll follow me, Lieutenant—might be well to acquaint yourself with the ground. Over here, if you please; a nice patch of greensward, we think. No soft spots that I know of, but feel for thyself; there was a fight for a sergeancy here yesterday."

I should explain, Your Grace, that in those days all promotions were settled man to man, with the captain of the troop for judge. A couple of dozen men-at-arms ringed the little battlefield already, and more were running up; and now, as I tested the turf with my toes, out from his tent came old Matteo Scarlatti, yawning and tying up his shirt-strings.

"Ha, Ercole," he says in his asthmatical wheeze (caused by breathing so much powder-smoke, the joke ran), "this the fellow?"

His servant came out with a fald-stool and he sat down, surveying me.

"What's thy name, man?"

I told him.

"Same that let the Venetians drive his troop into a swamp?"

"Sir—" I began furiously, but he flapped his hand.

"Very well—very well; I've made mistakes myself—I expect. But make no blunders hereabouts, or Ercole will have ye spitted like a goose. Well—well—are we to be here all night? Who takes south and who north—'a God's name let's get on with it."

O BUT it was good to be back again among my own sort—there were hundreds of 'em round about us now—and away (saving Your Grace's presence) from the nobility or gentry! No need to wonder, here, should I be stabbed in the back; on the contrary, the hope that if I killed his lieutenant in fair fight, Matteo might give me the office.

"Ready?" says Ercole, kissing the cross of his sword hilt and smiling at me.

I kissed and smiled likewise; felt out his guard and found it very stiff indeed, and began circling to my right so that he might have to face the setting sun.

Without success, of course; no, his lordship was up to that trick. And notoriously far past it, as I heard in the laugh that went up from our audience. I rolled an eye sidewise in indignation—and at once felt a cold breath pass my face as Ercole slashed a curl from my left-hand whiskers.

"Come, come, Caradosso," says mine adversary, "take me not so lightly, man. Remember thine oath."

Another inch on the end of my sword and he would have had those words pinned in his Adam's apple; but since

that inch was lacking, he survived to start moving round to my right—still holding his blade in the awkward way I've mentioned, and trying on me the very trick I'd failed with in the beginning. This annoyed me; and had he employed any Christian method of sword-play, he must have suffered in the attack I now launched on him. Possibly Your Grace knows enough of the art to appreciate the principle — successive passados in order down to quarto, then back to secundo at a jump; one's adversary (one hopes) parrying vainly and fatally in tierce.

But oons! — the way Ercole fought, there was no quarto, no prime—nothing; he waggled his blade in front of him as a woman does a fan; and not once, during the first quarter-hour of that combat, did he offer to make a point at me. Indeed, I scarce saw how he ever could, holding his hilt mace-fashion; cursed myself for not having noted this disability before and—as near as nothing got myself run through the giblets. O deceit! O iniquity! I left my guard open to tempt him into a cut for the head; bent as he made it, stepped in for the kill—and what happened?

Why, instead of trying to halt his right arm and so giving me a chance to run him through, he flung his hilt from right hand into left, staved me off with a parry like a brick wall and in an instant had his point through the fullness of my tunic.

A roar went up from the crowd, and by Gabriel his trumpet, I thought for one moment (feeling the knock on my ribs) that I'd been killed. I've been run through in my time; at first one feels nothing—'tis the warm gush inside, after some moments, that tells the tale. But I was in no mood to wait for this symptom—I clenched my left fist and smote his lordship hard on the nose, he should weep for me anyhow. . . .

It was as he staggered backward that I saw there was no blood on his blade.

"Now—now!" shouts old Matteo, very gentlemanly and hospitable. "Stick him now, Caradosso, while he can't see!"

But—well, we had been fighting very hard, and I had just undergone a great shock to my sensibilities; so I thought myself entitled to some few moments' rest without prejudice to that oath of mine. Seeing that my lord Ercole was wiping his eyes on his sleeve, I looked at Matteo; he met my eyes with scorn, flapped his hands and turned sidewise to look at the sunset.

"Ready again?" says Ercole; and would you believe it—as we engaged again, there was someone in the crowd who shouted: "*Evviva* Caradosso!"

"Let not your lordship imagine for a moment—" says I.

"No, no," says he, grinning and wriggling out of a trap I'd set, like an eel out of a basket. "You'll kill me as you swore, or—"

HE REACHED in at this and snipped a curl off my other whisker; and I saw that I must take order with him immediately. In despatches prior to this one, I have made mention of the *colpo di Bentivoglio;* I think I have even tried to explain it to Your Grace, thus wasting much valuable ink—but no matter; the time was come for it, and I prepared to put it into execution. 'Tis a dangerous trick; there's no half-way about it; somebody must die, either on the thrust or the riposte—because look, sire; for the eleventh time; really it must be shown, but here's the principle: I retreat steadily, letting Ercole drive me back, as he thinks; here he comes overhead like a steel thunderstorm—here he creeps up from the ground like an iron vine; he will abandon these devices in a moment and come for my belly. No—he changes hands again, the subtle rascal, and goes back to work on my knees. Which I remove from his neighborhood, he following always.

Your Grace is with me still? I hope not incommoded by sweat in the eyes, as I was?

Ha—up he comes!

Left-handed — thrusting — we must press against him and tire that wrist; one attack—still a strong repulse and here comes a counter-attack by circle; I beat it down. On we go again—parade in secundo, up to prime, parade again—aha, his wrist's going!—and here he comes, right-handed again; a nice high

attack and this time I think we have him, by God!

We send a poke at him—just a little bit short of our true reach, mark you; keeping the wrist a trifle bent. He steps away from it—too far; we must entice him. Come, chuck, come—who'd hurt thee? A second thrust—just a little shorter still; and a third—aha, he's growing bolder; hath the measure of our reach, he thinks, poor man. Now once more—or will he attack and must we start this weary business over again? No—he waits; we thrust again—always a little, just a little, short; he steps in and now, Your Highness will remark, his breastbone is six good inches within our reach. At the next thrust, he'll step back no more than four, expecting thus to be out of range; and that will leave us (straightening our wrist) two inches of point to slip into the arch of his ribs —just where the heart lies, Your Highness.

So—ha!

And my sword flew out of my hand, just as it had at Castello Nero—right to the feet of Matteo il Vecchio this time, though. I saw him pick it up, spit on the blade, lay it across his knees and lean forward to watch the kill.

I glanced at the sun, whose upper edge was just above the horizon, throwing a gold light on the green trees, very pretty; folded my arms and faced mine adversary. I should have liked to know the secret of that disarm, but—

Folding my arms, I felt something hard under the elbows; and now indeed horror came down on me. Some little dazed by that drug of Girolamo's; taken all aback by Ercole's proposal to fight —aghast! I had not taken off my stomacher; I had been fighting an unarmored man, myself in belly-armor!

Ercole was leaning on his sword, grinning and looking at the plate. As I looked down and looked up from the discovery, he threw back his head and roared with laughter, came over and clapped me on the back.

"My lord—my lord—" I stuttered.

With another roar, the men who had been watching—and who had been as unconscious of my fault as I had been myself—now swarmed out of the ranks

He waggled his blade in front of him as a woman does a fan.

and hoisted up Ercole shoulder-high.

"Evviva il teniente! Bravo, bravo!" they shouted; and I shouted with them, my soul shaking with thankfulness. Because had I killed him by some chance, God forbid! There'd have been a slow fire and me hanged over it by one leg—whereas now, by accident and oversight, but nevertheless, I'd exceeded the promise of mine oath; I'd essayed to murder Ercole like any bravo. I was clear on the books of Heaven, therefore, and crossed myself in thanks.

Just at which moment, there must needs ride up a courier. He gestured and shouted at Ercole, there in his exaltation, but he was neither heard nor seen except by me, who at moments of rejoicing have always an eye out for bearers of bad news.

It was not until old Matteo got up and shambled over and raised his wheezy

voice in command, that the tumult died down.

"Well, fellow?" he demanded of the messenger.

Ercole sprang down from his throne of shoulders and came forward.

" 'Tis thou, Gian?" says he. "What's the matter?"

"War!" says the man. "War on your lordship's territory! Young Cesare di Naldi is out to avenge his father; he's defied Count Ugo and invaded Castello Nero!"

Old Matteo wiped the blade of my sword and handed it to me.

Ercole was looking at him.

"Well?" snaps the old man. "Hast learned nothing in all these years? Let them fight; and at the climax step thou in and claim thine own again. Take half the troop and begone with ye."

"But—" says Ercole.

"Look you," says Matteo. "His Grace of Rometia's playing grabs thereabouts; he owes me a thousand ducats for manhire, the old bastard; I'll thwart him! Do you go, therefore, or do I?"

"I'll go," says Ercole.

"Then begone!" says Matteo. "Trumpeter—where's that trumpeter? Blow boot and saddle!"

IV

WOW but that was a forced march!

We started in the afterglow of the sunset—some two hundred and fifty of us, being the light cavalry of Matteo's six hundred; and wearing little more armor than prudent men might have worn on a furlough. Moreover, to my amazement, Ercole kept not to the roads; no, he had a map and led cross-fields from one loop of highway to another, as though all his men had been race-riders. The standing crops were all harvested by this time; vineyards (the devil for cavalry, on account of the stalks) were few in those parts; so that we went toward Castello Nero nigh as straight as a covey of birds.

"Hawks!" says Ercole, pointing to his banner; and sure enough there was a hawk on it by way of device. "How long did it take ye to come up, Caradosso?"

"Four days, sir."

"Allow one for Girolamo's pony and one for thy stoppings and guzzlings at inns, and that still leaves one day wasted. *We* shall be at Castello Nero by morning."

"Ser Luigi was not too anxious to catch up with his sorcerer, ha-ha!" says Girolamo.

"Let's say he was not too eager to stab anyone in the back—sorcerer or no, eh?" says Ercole; and I was grateful to him for that. Ah, sire; in fifty years of serving princes, I have been some twenty-seven times wounded in action; but not one of those scars aches me in mine old age so badly as wounds I've dealt folks in my time, with no danger to myself. 'Tis fashionable nowadays to speak ill of war and defame warriors, and to exalt negotiation and the black-frocked fellows who creep about chancelleries; but still (not to labor the point) I think humanity shows to better advantage on a red field, than round a green table.

There was a full moon that night; we rode as it rose, and all the time it sailed through the heavens; we were still riding when the day quenched it and 'twas through mists of early morning that we came to Taldi, the outlying village of Castello Nero.

Scouts went forward from here, while we of the main body unsaddled, wiped our horses and let the poor brutes browse a little while we ate our bread and sausage.

"Sir," says I to Ercole in this pause, "whom are we to fight in this business?"

He had his mouth full, so held up one forefinger.

"Because," says I, "your lordship will remember that I'm still in the pay of Lord Ugo."

He swallowed.

"We are not here to fight at all," says Ercole, haggling at a heel of bread with his dagger. "Ugo hath stolen the lordship—very well. As a consequence, he hath killed old Cesare—very well. As a consequence of that, Cesare's son hath declared war on him—very well. The outcome is in the hands of God; we shall see only that my lord Duke of Rometia doth not insert a finger. We condottieri

like not lordships above a certain size; they're bad for business."

"Are we to fight Rometia with no more than two hundred and fifty men?" I asked.

Ercole was chewing again, but he shook his head. I took this to mean that Pietro (having so lately engulfed Nola and Ferrante) would not dare interfere full-force in this business, for fear of the Council of Nobles.

And I was right, too. The scouts, returning, reported that the troops of Ugo and young Cesare were drawn up in the Val d'Ambro two thousand strong a side; but that the Rometian horse numbered no more than ourselves.

"Where are they?" asks Ercole, brushing off the litter of crumbs from his scarf.

"To one side, your honor," says the sergeant of patrol. "On a slope, ready to charge into any flank that seems to be losing already."

Ercole laughed.

"We'll make a strategist out of thee yet, Paolo. Well—suppose we take our station on the opposite side."

The sergeant saluted and was gone; the trumpeter blew to horse and off we moved—but not, mark you, all the way into the valley. No; at the top of its declivity, Ercole halted the troops; told them to sit their horses there on the crest and ordered me and Girolamo and the sergeant and standard-bearer only, to ride with him down the slope.

We dallied on the way, so that the Rometians on the opposite slope might certainly appraise us; and then, the day promising hot, came to the halt in a little clump of trees.

"That should give His Highness food for thought, Luigi," says Ercole. "How many men have we atop this ridge? 'A doesn't know. And since 'a's a damned old thief, he'll expect the worst. He's such a rogue, I wager he'll think we have a thousand men; and if he murdered his brother, as they say, he'll be crediting us with artillery besides. . . . Aha, they're moving!"

The main forces, he meant—Ugo's and Cesare's; the latter having now started to move up the valley, and the others to meet them.

THE horses were at the walk still; but as I watched, the two wings of Cesare's army quickened pace and began to draw ahead of the center; he had been well taught, evidently, in the new school—a smash into the flanks, a boring inward; then a smash by the center into a mid-line that should be cut off from its rear.

This was the first time ever I'd looked down on a battle from a height and a distance, as captains-general are wont to do; and O it was queer, to see those little shining figures, creeping toward one another! No jingle of harness, no noise of horses snorting, no smell of sweat and leather came to us here; I was put to it to believe that any of those little beetles were mothers' sons, feeling as I had felt before a charge—heart high, seemingly pushed up by a swelling of the stomach; cheeks burning, but back strangely cold; hand suddenly wet on the sword-hilt!

"Now, if Ugo hath the sense God gave him to be born withal—" says Ercole. "Aha!"

The opposing forces were now some thousand paces apart; and at a trumpet-call, the whole line of Castello Nero cavalry increased to the trot.

"He hath some wit amid his rascality," says Ercole. "He's to catch 'em in mid-maneuver. But—down lances, you fool!"

As though the usurper had heard him, the trumpet blew again—the warning for the charge. All the line of bright points above the front rank dipped and reappeared like a crisp of foam about the knees of the horses, and there was a shimmer in the air as the second rank drew swords.

"The gallop! The gallop!" says Ercole, and I saw his knuckles were white on his bridle-rein. "They'll not have time—"

It was from the other side that the trumpet now blew, and a drumming sound rose from the earth as those flying wings of Cesare's lowered lances in their turn and struck spurs to their horses.

The drumming increased—Ugo's men were at the gallop too; the space between the troops was narrowing—it was half, now, what it had been, and a thin sound of shouting came up to us from the

valley. Could it be from whiskered men in fury—that noise which was drowned by the piping of a bird in a fir-tree near at hand?

"His line's ragging out—his line's ragging!" shouted Ercole. "Bring thy center up, 'a God's name! Look there, Caradosso!"

I had time to note that Ugo's line was indeed ragged—the center holding back and the wings seeming to shrink from the coming shock; but there was a bare hundred paces to be traversed now before the catastrophe—fifty—a score, and then—

Clang!

I'd expected the crash of contact to be thin and far away as those shouts; but it seemed louder, as the armors came together, than ever it had sounded when I was in the midst of it. And that was but the wings touching; a moment after, there was a deathly noise as the centers came breast to breast—but I forgot; Your Grace hath heard the like of it; that time when you were ten years old and your father blooded you to warfare, watching the charge at Crema. I remember *that* day! Six wounds I got, and was half deaf a week from folk hammering on my helmet. I suppose to Your Highness' ears all the blacksmith-work of that fight sounded as this one did to me—a tapping like a tinker mending a kettle in an outhouse.

Ah, well. . . .

"Where's Ugo, I wonder?" says Ercole. "That's not he, surely?"

A dozen of the Castello Nero men had broken from the rear of the right wing; and an officer in armor was beating them back into conflict. A moment later, a dozen more broke from behind the center, but there was none to halt them and they took their way hindward without let.

After them, another clot detached itself—and another—and I saw that the first deserters, on the right wing, had unhorsed the officer and fled.

"Sir—" says I to Ercole, but he laid a strong hand on my arm. "After all, sir, I'm an officer of those troops—"

"Ye could be an archangel," says Ercole, "with a flaming sword and all, and —look!"

THE banner of young Cesare had been out of sight for some time, in the writhing mass of the mêlée; but now it reappeared three quarters of the way through the Castello Nero troops, by God! And with it for a marker, I could make out a sort of tide in that lake of death—a current such as a water-rat maketh as he swims; only the wake of that banner was in blood. Cesare's center—the heavy cavalry—from being a recess in his line, had become a wedge; it was driving into the Castello Nero forces, and as I watched it broke through; spread like a rivet that the armorer hammers, and began to take the wavering adversaries in the rear. Agh—I've had that done to me; I know, I know! I've had some bastard in front cutting at me, and howled for help to some fellow behind and felt *him* lay a mace across my skull—Your Grace, it's disconcerting; there's nothing that will make a fighting man more fretful.

"They're going back," says Ercole through his teeth. "They'll break in a minute. And once they break, God help them! *Where* is Ugo, I wonder?"

"They break! They break!" shouted the sergeant, transported beyond discipline.

And it was true.

No longer were the little bunches of Castello Nero men backing out of the fight and striking back as they cleared themselves; they were wrenching their horses about and spurring them to the rear. They'd be coming up the slopes toward us soon, I thought—and even then, beheld one man break from the left wing in our direction.

"We'd beter move, sir," says I, but Ercole made me no answer. "Sir—we're in the track of—"

"Caradosso."

"Yes, sir?"

He was pointing to the man who was riding toward us—a man in full armor, leaning forward almost on his horse's neck to give the animal help up the hillside.

"Yes, sir; I saw him."

"Then look at him!"

I looked, but could see naught notable save that he had blood up to his elbows

and that one of his greaves was missing.

'Twas not until he reached within fifty paces of our tree-clump, that I knew him; it was Ugo. At that moment he raised his head. He looked back, saw a knot of Cesare's men spurring upward after him from the valley—

"Poor devil!" says Ercole, riding out of the shadow into the full light.

Ugo turned a ghastly face us-ward at that instant, and saw the man he'd wronged.

Verily I believe he saw not me, nor the sergeant, nor the standard-bearer at all; Ercole alone filled his despairing vision. His mouth fell open and its lips worked, and he raised his hand as if to cross himself and it hung above his breastplate paralyzed.

"Ugo! My lord!" cries Ercole. "Come, sir!"

Still the wretch surveyed him as if he'd been a ghost—how do I know? He may have thought he was one—that Bertuccio or I had done our mission; ghosts walk not ordinarily by daylight, to be sure; but certes the look on Ugo's face suited no meeting with mortal man.

The pursuers were within shouting distance now, and shouting they were—"Morte! Morte!"—"Death! Death!"—but their quarry paid them no heed.

"Ugo," cries my lord again, urging his horse as though to put himself between the usurper and his enemies, but in vain.

With a yell like a soul dragged pit-ward in the mystery-plays, my lord of Castello Nero lifted his horse about on its hind legs, struck spur and fled—swordless, witless, screaming still—straight toward the posse that was following him.

They shouted as he bore down on them—some half-dozen, there must have been, who opened into two parties of three to receive him. Did he know he was going to his death? Did he know where he was going at all, except it were away from the pale face of Ercole?

Did he ever know the end of his ambition, his forgery, his treachery and his tries at murder?

I doubt it. He had little time to think, between seeing Ercole and riding into those soldiers of Cesare's.

And a second after he had reached them, a corporal, rising in his stirrups and cutting back-hand, had left him no head to think with. . . .

VI

SO, YOUR Grace! Now—what 'a God's name called all this forth?

I look back and behold—Your Highness asked me nothing about Castello Nero, nothing about Matteo il Vecchio and his lieutenant; nothing about all this bloodshed—only whether an old woman burned out of her cottage could curse Your Serenity to any effect.

And here I've scribbled on—

Well—sure I've shown the downfall of Ugo Fontesecca; but then I've shown he was not cursed at all, albeit he thought he was; so where's the point of all this?

I feel it pricking me somewhere; let's see.

Let's look at the conference after the battle; my lords Ercole and Cesare were there; myself humbly in attendance; and His Grace of Rometia sulking at their lordships; there was some talk of cursing there.

"Someone must rule the county," says Your Highness' grandsire. "Your former lordship informs me he hath no taste for government; your good youthfulness, Cesare, protests against further addition to your lands—"

"Which leaves only your highness to accept the burden?" says Ercole.

Pietro shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands.

Ercole arose, as if in haste to begone. The Duke looked at him eagerly with those red eyes.

Young Cesare, whose eyes were large and blue, seemed troubled.

"Your lordships," says Ercole, "will settle the matter betwixt you; I ask one thing only—to be spared future suspicion of wizardry."

Cesare laughed; but Pietro stared very hard at Ercole.

"Should you, my lord duke, take over the government; and should Matteo my captain take umbrage; or should the

(Continued on page 125)

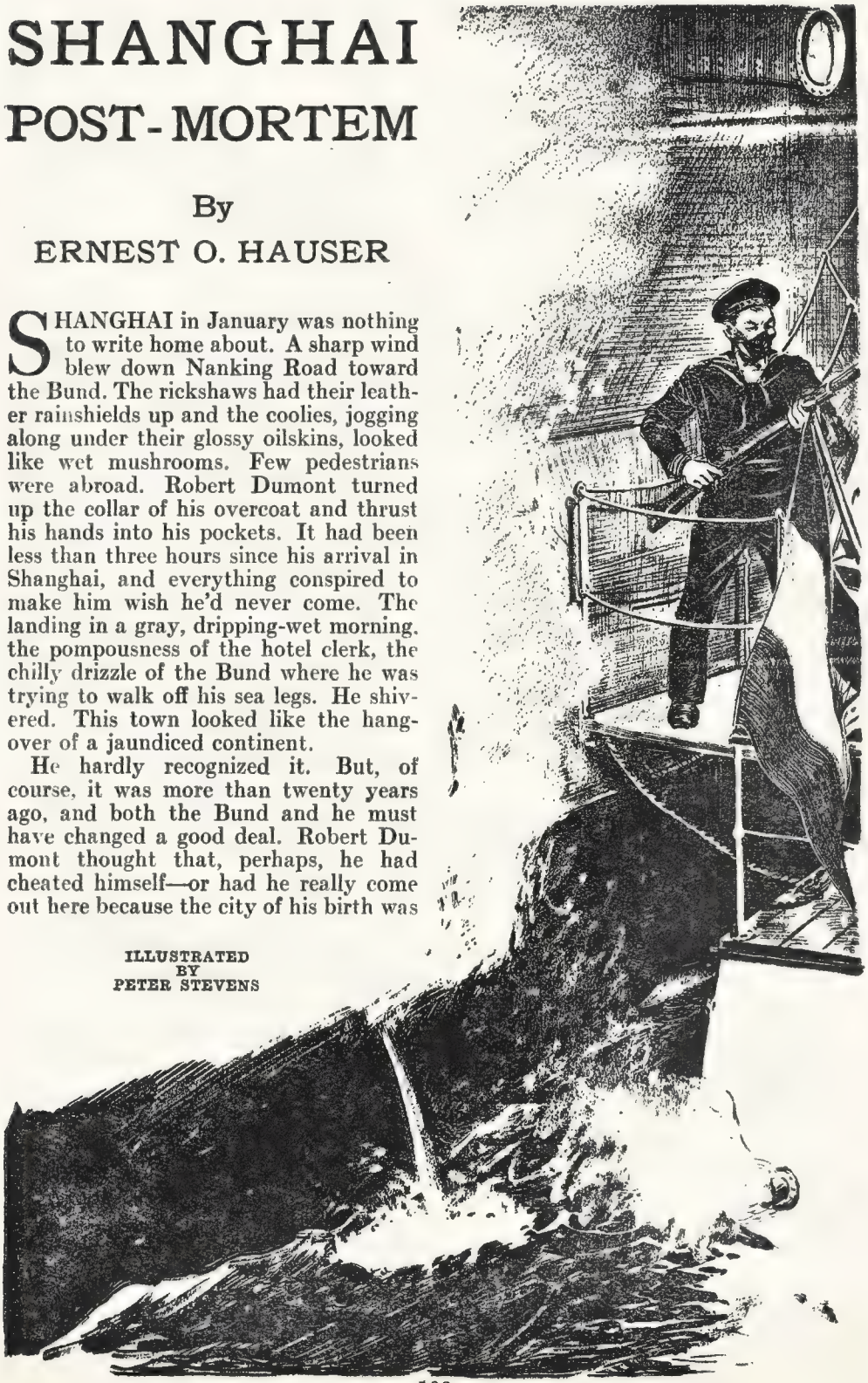
SHANGHAI POST-MORTEM

By
ERNEST O. HAUSER

SHANGHAI in January was nothing to write home about. A sharp wind blew down Nanking Road toward the Bund. The rickshaws had their leather rainshields up and the coolies, jogging along under their glossy oilskins, looked like wet mushrooms. Few pedestrians were abroad. Robert Dumont turned up the collar of his overcoat and thrust his hands into his pockets. It had been less than three hours since his arrival in Shanghai, and everything conspired to make him wish he'd never come. The landing in a gray, dripping-wet morning, the pompousness of the hotel clerk, the chilly drizzle of the Bund where he was trying to walk off his sea legs. He shivered. This town looked like the hangover of a jaundiced continent.

He hardly recognized it. But, of course, it was more than twenty years ago, and both the Bund and he must have changed a good deal. Robert Dumont thought that, perhaps, he had cheated himself—or had he really come out here because the city of his birth was

ILLUSTRATED
BY
PETER STEVENS



fighting for its life the way France had fought? Because the Shanghai front was the same front that he had done his futile bit to defend, and the ammunition he carried in his brain and the weapons in his doctor's bag might keep it from cracking? Perhaps it was more elementary, and more convincing, than that. Perhaps all he had really wanted was to come home, after horror, exile, and flight. Home to a place where he could once more feel that he belonged.

One of the sailors jumped aboard the launch. "You stay in place," he said.

"Like hell I will!" Dumont shouted. "I've come to see the captain."

No wonder, then, that he was disappointed! Grimly he remembered how elated he had been that afternoon in Madras, a month ago, when he finally wangled his berth as a ship's doctor on the *Fanny Brent*—passage to Shanghai! And here he stood, at the terminal of his flight across two continents, with nothing but his doctor's bag and a vague hope. Hope for what? "You are a fool, Dumont," he said to himself.

At this moment something whistled hard by his left ear and hurtled into the stone façade of the building where he stood. Dumont leaped into the shadow of the entrance and flattened himself behind the massive doorjamb. Another whistle. The stone of the building chipped—two inches from his face.

He cast a quick glance over his shoulder before he withdrew into the safety of the building. All he saw were half a dozen Chinese trotting along the sidewalk in both directions, obviously anxious to get indoors as quickly as possible. So this was the way the city of his destiny chose to welcome him! Bullets instead of bouquets.

The building where he had taken refuge was No. 3, the Bund. "I am sorry, sir," someone said to him, "but only members are privileged to visit here. I am terribly sorry."

Dumont squared his shoulders. He had not traveled halfway around the globe to become an exhibit in the Shanghai morgue. "I am not visiting here," he said. "And if I were, I wouldn't consider it a privilege. Can't anyone act friendly in this cursed town? Members! *Je m'en fiche!*"

The gate-keeper started to remonstrate, but a voice cut him short.

"Hold on there! Wait a minute, stranger! No white man shall be driven from this threshold, in times like these!"

The raw English voice came from the inner sanctum where the clink of glasses punctuated lively conversation.

Dumont turned around. A huge fellow with twinkling brown eyes set in a fleshy face seized his arm with the grip of an amateur wrestler. "Enter, young man, as Harry Gundheim's guest, and enjoy the dubious privileges of the Shanghai Club."

DUMONT was inside before he knew it, standing at the bar with this jovial Gargantua, each confronted with a double Scotch. This was more like it. This was more like the great white bastion Dumont had expected to find, last outpost of a brave old world where all men were brothers under the skin if only their skin was white. Could it be that, only a few minutes ago, someone had practiced sharpshooting on the Bund, with his head as a target? Robert gulped his drink and forgot his troubles. This morning's anxiety and discontent dissolved, to float toward the ceiling amid the scuds of blue tobacco smoke. After the odyssey of the last few months, this was like coming home, almost. This was warm and comfortable and *ancien-régime.*

"Frenchman?" asked Harry Gundheim. He loosened his wrestler's hold on Robert Dumont without letting go of him completely.

Robert nodded. "Half Frenchman and half Yank, sir. Blitzed out of Europe. I sat in the Maginot wine cellars while it happened. After that—I was lucky. I managed to catch a tanker out of Marseille, just in time."

"You need another drink!" Gundheim let go of Robert's arm and, with a newfound interest, took his measure. From his extreme altitude he looked down upon a lean but well-proportioned man just over thirty, dressed in clothes that for all their service had not lost the luster of solid continental elegance. He saw two nervous hands which could have been called artistic if it had not been for their strong knuckles and the slight film of hair on the phalanges. A pair of defiant eyes burned in a face that seemed to hold the hazards and the disappointments of the long twisting trek east like the worn pages of a logbook. He saw, in those defiant eyes, a determination so strong that it had him puzzled.

"And got ashore this morning in Shanghai?" Gundheim asked. "Welcome to the banks of the Whangpoo. You may find it a bit bleak, this time of year, and there is that nasty wind. But it isn't like the storm over Europe. Welcome to Shanghai, my friend."

Robert lifted his eyes and looked around. It was the classic picture that epitomized the China Coast, just as the gay crowds along the Champs-Elysées had epitomized a Paris that was no more. Here, along the world's longest bar, stood the taipans, the managers of foreign firms with good resounding names. They had come out here, many of them as young and mettlesome griffins, Robert knew, to buy John Chinaman's silk and tea and eggs and peanuts, and to sell John Chinaman a bill of goods in turn: automobiles and cameras, guns and shoes and oil. They had held their own, in the precarious sanctity of the treaty port which had been an empty mudflat a century ago, and they still stood here, lined up along the world's longest bar, discussing their affairs over a Scotch and soda as if nothing much had happened—a glorious battlefront without armor, a lost brigade without a battlecry.

Robert looked around and he rather liked it.

A man with a hay-colored walrus-mustache, whose elbow had rested on the edge of the bar only a few inches from Robert's, turned round. "A stranger to these parts? Let me tell you, young man, you are in bad company. Going around with nabobs won't make you very popular with the church-mice in this town. Sir Harry counts in millions, you know, while the rest of us poor mortals still count in dollars and cents. Mostly cents." He laughed. His American accent with the pronounced r's of the Middle West seemed out of place in this wood-paneled British setting.

"Bear or bull?" he said. "Buying or selling?"

Robert looked at him for a moment, wondering whether it would be impolite to expose the two friendly taipans to the anti-climactic truth. Surely they expected him to be one of them, to be here on business, to be a wizard who could turn wood-oil into mex dollars or mex dollars into airplanes, or mex dollars into gold dollars. He hated to let them down.

"I am not a merchant, gentlemen," he said. "My business is medicine. I am a surgeon."

"And you have come out here to practice surgery? A noble purpose." Sir Harry felt, no doubt, that he had to make up for the American's patent disappointment.

But the gentleman from the States was not to be downed that easily. "Why in the world did you pick Shanghai?" he drawled. "Why, we have some of the best American doctors, and there's half a dozen men from Vienna . . ."

"You see," Robert explained, "I am not exactly a stranger in this part of the world. I was born in the French concession and I breathed Shanghai air till I was seven or eight. Then, my parents died and I was sent back to get my education—Sorbonne and all that. I was working in a hospital in Paris when it started—" He paused and his determined eyes looked into the gray ones of the American. "Now, after the debacle, Shanghai seemed the only place for me to go. I have come home."

There was embarrassment all around, but Sir Harry rose to the occasion like a gentleman. "I say," he roared, "this man must think us barbarians! Making him tell his life story without even being properly introduced." His raw voice took on formality. "You may have gathered that I am Harry Gundheim. This gentleman is John Wheeler Matthews, respected citizen of the International Settlement and number one boy of the Orient Bank."

Robert shook hands with Matthews. "My name is Dumont," he said.

The American dropped Robert's hand as if it had been a charged wire. He opened his mouth and his eyes expanded, vacant with incredulity. "Dumont?" he repeated. "Robert Dumont? You are Robert Dumont? Well, I'll be . . . Harry, did you hear? This here fellow claims he's the young Dumont and I'll be damned if he doesn't look it! Robert Dumont of Shanghai."

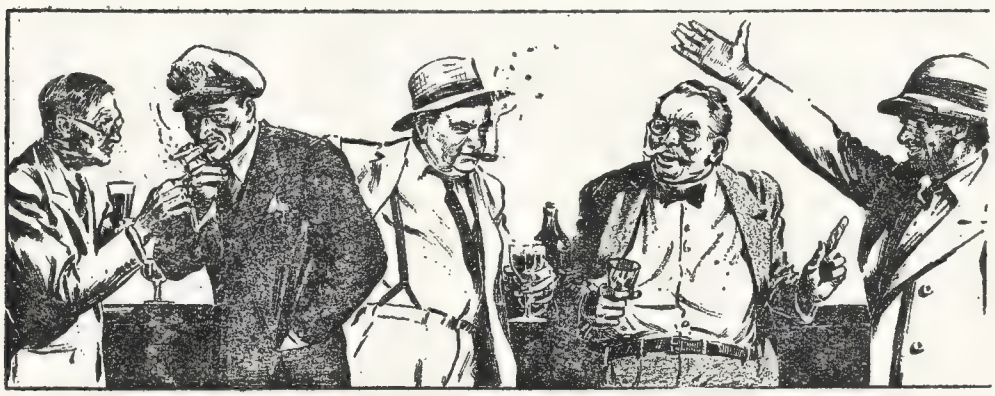
TWO men, standing at the bar next to Matthews, turned their heads. They left their drinks and came to greet Robert as one greets a prodigal son. The heir of the oldest hong in Frenchtown, one of Shanghai's largest and most ven-

erable firms, had returned to the city of the mudflat! Presently the news of his arrival spread through the club. It drowned all talk of kerosene and airplane engines and lent a new perfume to the scent of noble Scotch. It ran along that gigantic bar of which a wit had once remarked that one could see the curving of the earth when one looked down its surface; it capered from head to head until it reached, at the distant end of the room, a small group of men who clustered around an object in their midst. Once there, it did not ricochet. It lodged.

The small group of men at the far end of the bar opened up like a fist, baring the object it had held. The object was roguery. That jaw was balanced by a ponderous forehead blending into a hairless skull. The sick dull color of his skin was made sicker and duller by two glistening eyes.

Robert felt their sharpness cut into his face. He could see the white in them now, as the mummy slowly rolled toward him along the length of the bar, working the wheels of his chair with strong bony hands. There was a sudden silence as though a cloud had passed over the group of taipans that surrounded Robert.

When the wheelchair had come very close to Robert it stopped. Just then, in the all but intolerable hush, Sir Harry came to the rescue. "Surely," he said



No white man shall be driven from this threshold in times like these . . . .

a man in a chair—a wheelchair. The man in it looked like no human figure Robert had ever seen, and he had his eyeful in the hospitals of Europe and in the scrambling ports of Asia. This man did not look like a man. He looked like a mummy, rather, with his face of shriveled parchment in which dark shadows carved out the cheekbones and the high bridge of the nose.

Robert wondered how life could cling to a dry and broken form like this, so obviously past its intended span. And his answer, the answer of a doctor, was that the fragrance of life would have fled this body long ago had it not been commanded to stay by a ferocious will. There was a mouth that seemed to be drawn with a ruler. A sharp and bony jaw jutted out directly under it, giving the face an expression of uncommon

with nonchalance, "surely you remember Mr. Kurtz, Dumont. The old and venerable friend of your family, and for nearly three generations manager of Dumont Frères."

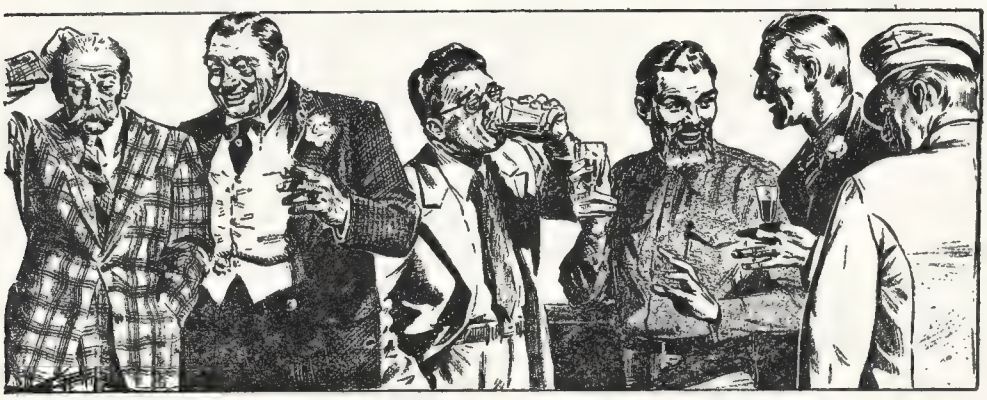
"Never mind the ceremony." The mummy spoke with a high-pitched, mocking voice, not unlike that of a peeved child. "Robert knows who I am and I know a Dumont when I see him. You could have announced your intention to return, my lad, as is the custom of gentlemen who go to visit with each other. And I dare say," he continued, pitting his peeved voice against Robert's mute bewilderment, "that the whole town would have turned out for a royal welcome." Then, quizzically, "Or did you want to surprise me? Did you want to catch old man Kurtz off guard?" The thought made the mummy chuckle.

"Perhaps you've only come to complain about the remittances I sent you every month—too modest, were they, for an independent gentleman? Well, here you are anyway, and even if you saw fit to sneak into town like a stranger, I am here to welcome you. You'll find that the stock of Dumont Frères has not deteriorated in my feeble hands." He chuckled again. "You can take over tomorrow, Robert Dumont."

The bystanders broke ranks, as it were, and came forward, crowding into the empty space around Kurtz and Robert. They all shook hands with Dumont and there was much cheerful relief. Those who had formed the group around Kurtz' wheelchair before, welcomed Kurtz. I have come to practice my profession."

Could it be that his modesty amused Kurtz? Robert saw his grotesque jaw move up and down in a struggle for articulation. "Spoken like a Dumont," he finally chirped. "My sincere apologies! The club is an ill-fitting arena for domestic arguments. We'll soon find out who sent you—for all we know it may be the mighty Mr. Tong himself. Ha-ha-ha! I shall see you at the office, young man, one of these days." Chuckling, the mummy turned the wheelchair around abruptly, thus indicating that the interview was over.

Robert felt the blood sing in his temples. He would have been able to parry



. . . . Enter and enjoy the dubious privileges of the Shanghai Club.

Robert with special warmth, as if to apologize for the old man's contumely.

Dumont had to shout to make himself heard. "Gentlemen," he said, "give me a chance! You have been kind to me, all of you, extremely kind. But now—" he faced Kurtz across a yard or two of empty space— "now my turn has come to say something to you."

Robert saw nothing but friendly encouragement in their faces, and Sir Harry Gundheim's eyes twinkled as if to say, "Go on, my boy, and say it." But the face down in front of him betrayed no emotion.

"Mr. Kurtz," he said, "there has been a mistake and I want to clear it up. I have not come to Shanghai to sit in a swivel chair in my father's office. I have not come to take my place as the head of Dumont Frères. I am a surgeon, Mr. open invective or irony with equal weapons. Kurtz' incongruous gaiety made him furious. He stood there, pale, his eyes fixed on the wheelchair which was calmly moving back to the far end of the bar.

He did not turn his head when somebody tapped him on the shoulder. It was John Matthews, the American. "What do you say—" he drawled. "It's time for lunch. Like to have a bite at my house? My daughter will be there to do the honors. What do you say?"

"That's right," said Robert, who hardly heard. "Let's get out of here."

He turned on his heel and strode toward the exit, with Matthews struggling to keep pace with him and muttering, as they crossed the hall, something about the crazy English who made it a point to keep ladies and Chinamen

out of these sacred precincts even now "while Rome was already burning."

THE weather had cleared and the Bund looked more cheerful than it had in the early morning. The ceiling had lifted, scraps of white cloud were sailing across the sky. The wind had changed its direction for it carried no moisture now. It came blowing in great gusts of crisp dry air and Dumont filled his lungs with it. From the foreshore, on the other side of the wide avenue, he could hear the monotonous chant of the waterfront coolies, as they jogged back and forth between the cargo junks and the shore with their heavy burdens balanced on bamboo poles across their shoulders.

The anger that had possessed Dumont a minute ago had evaporated now. He knew, in this good brisk air of the Bund, that he was a free man in a free town. That he was at liberty to do what he intended to do, and that no dehydrated mummy in a swivel chair at the Dumont head office had the power to thwart him. Nor any mysterious pistol shots that came out of nowhere. . . .

"This is Dr. Dumont who arrived here in the early mail." Matthews was presenting Robert to his daughter Patricia, who sat behind the wheel of a maroon convertible in front of the club.

The girl took Robert's hand with a firm grip. "Oh, one of the Dumont brothers?" she said.

Robert had to laugh. She seemed to think of Dumont Frères as something similar to the Marx Brothers. "My mother was American—a Massachusetts Yankee. It was my grandfather and his brother who founded the firm," he explained. "I represent the incompetent third generation, no good for anything except being a doctor. Somebody in there just told me it was a noble purpose —perhaps Shanghai can find use for me."

"Perhaps," she said, "and I wouldn't call it being incompetent if I were you."

"Pat should have been evacuated long ago—and p'aying golf right now on the sunny hillsides of Baguio," Matthews said with ill-concealed undertones of paternal pride, "but she did me a dirty trick, the brat. The day the womenfolk went aboard the *Jefferson* for the great exodus, she packed her suitcase and I took her to the pier. She kissed me good-bye and walked up the gangplank and left me standing there in that gloomy bunch of fathers and husbands, straining my eyes to find her. Well, I didn't." Matthews quite obviously cherished the memory of that moment. "And when the *Jefferson* pulled out and I was turning to go, who was sitting at the wheel of my car, waiting to drive me home."

They all laughed now.

"You see, there were two gangplanks," Patricia explained, "and Dad couldn't see the other from where he stood."

"Pat thinks we're sitting on a powder keg, all of us out here, and she wants to be with me when it happens," Matthews said, and he was serious now. "Won't let me out of her sight. An efficient bodyguard, my daughter."

"The Chinese idea of filial piety," Robert said, still laughing. "The fountainhead of all virtue. 'Retire early so that the mosquitoes may feast on you and will not sting your parents!' "

He immediately saw that he had said the wrong thing. A shadow fell upon the girl's face and her extraordinary eyes, gray but really iridescent were dark with something Robert was unable to fathom. Something closely akin to fear, he thought. It was as if the cold drizzle and the low clouds had been blown back by an ill wind. Why should she be frightened so by a harmless joke?

"Dr. Dumont," Patricia Matthews was saying, and the calmness in her voice made what she said sound even stranger, "you are honest and you are young. You have come to Shanghai with a purpose and the fulfilment of that purpose seems simple enough to you. I am sorry to tell you this, but I don't believe you will succeed." Robert could see that the fear was in her eyes again when she said, "Shanghai is a bad place for an honest young man with a purpose." And, with a little laugh that seemed a feeble attempt to turn the whole thing into a joke, "You had better go back home while the going is good."

"This from the girl who walked the

plank?" It was John Matthews' turn to pour oil on the waters of this curious conversation. "Dr. Dumont will be our guest at lunch, and if he wants to take your advice, well there'll be plenty of time for him to go back to Paris after the coffee, and with a couple of B. and B.'s under his belt. We can all sit in the front seat, Dumont. Will you get in first?"

But Robert Dumont did not move. "I know I accepted your invitation," he said rather stiffly, "and I hate to be rude. But I have a date with the customs inspector at twelve-thirty. I mustn't keep him waiting."

He turned away abruptly and walked across the Bund toward the customs jetty.

CHAPTER II

THE "NEW ORDER"

THERE was nothing unusual about the appearance of the hotel room: the reading lamp was turned on, the thermos pitcher had been filled with ice water and put on the bureau, the bed was opened, and Dumont's slippers were beside it. It was the usual order in which the Chinese roomboy left it every night for him to retire. Robert took off his shoes and walked, on stocking feet, across the room to get his slippers.

It was then that he noticed his caller. He sat in the rocking chair by the window and Robert stopped cold in the middle of the room when he saw him.

"This is an unusual hour for a visit," he said.

"So it is," said the visitor. "My sincere apologies, Dr. Dumont. Fact is I got here a couple of hours ago and decided to wait. Thought it would be better to see you tonight and get it over with." He laughed. "I hope you don't mind."

"What if I did?" Robert took the stranger's card. He read *Lt.-Com. Y. Omura. Publicity and Press Relations.*

He looked at the man who had risen from the rocking chair. His face was in the radius of the reading lamp and Robert saw a pair of clever eyes behind glasses, broad cheekbones, a small, slightly turned-up nose, a small black mustache and a firm jaw.

"Well, Commander," he said without sitting down, "what can I do for you?"

Omura lit a cigarette. "I have come to warn you, Dr. Dumont."

Robert, still in his stocking feet, plumped down on the bed and laughed. "You are not the first, Commander. It's been one damn warning after another, all day."

"That is not surprising." Omura did not share his hilarity. "May I ask by whom you have been warned?"

"Look here," said Robert, "if you have come to tell me something, let's have it. I am tired. I've got a busy day tomorrow."

Omura smiled as if to indicate how busy he was himself. "Will you be busy at your office—on the French Bund?"

"So that's what you're fishing for. This thing is beginning to be funny."

"I have come to tell you," said Omura in a smooth, businesslike voice, "that by doing so you will save yourself, and us, a good deal of unnecessary trouble. Shanghai, you see, is not the paradise of the rugged individualist that it used to be. The white man in Shanghai, Dr. Dumont, is confronted with a choice. He can accept the realities and throw himself into cheerful cooperation. Or—" From Omura's tone it appeared to Robert that his visitor included himself among those realities. "I don't mind telling you that the number of realists in this town is considerable."

Robert still held his visitor's calling card in his hand. "May I ask," he said, "what all this has to do with Publicity and Press Relations? I wish you'd come to the point, Commander."

"I have come to the point." Omura's voice was unchanged. "I am a navy man. But my superiors in the Imperial Navy thought that I'd be more useful on the banks of the Whangpoo than on the bridge of a battleship. I am here on special detail, Doctor. My American training makes me a good man to go around with foreigners. You are a foreigner."

"You are the first spy I have ever met," said Robert.

"So Mohammed has come to the mountain," the mummy said.

This was the most ludicrous thing Omura had heard in years. He laughed long and heartily.

It was Robert's turn to remain serious. "You spoke of the white man's choice, Commander. What is the alternative to—cheerful cooperation?"

Omura looked thoughtful. He did not answer right away. The expression on his face was impenetrable as he asked, "Have you ever heard of a person named Percy Tong, Doctor?"

Dumont had spent less than a week in Shanghai but he had already come to consider preposterousness a characteristic of the town, part of its local color, and he wondered at it no more than Alice would have wondered at the behavior of the March Hare. Of course, he had heard of Percy Tong. When Kurtz had first thrown the name at him, in his contumelious welcome speech at the Shanghai Club, the day of his arrival, its mention had not made sense to Robert. But then, he had heard it more often, absorbing the gossip of this seething metropolis in bars and clubs and hotel lobbies and in the homes of white taipans.

They had talked about the mighty Tong as one talks about the weather or the stock market—in a matter-of-fact fashion and with the understanding that the subject was always a good one if there was nothing better to discuss. Robert had listened to it by the hour. He had gleaned, from those idle colloquies, that Percy Tong was the omnipotent and omnipresent Chinese boss who ruled the vast expanse of no-man's land behind the lines of the invader.

Percy Tong was the master of the hidden passes and canals through which fuel and ammunition and other war supplies still filtered into China. He was the power that swayed the fortunes of war, and he could sway it either way. While Chungking trusted him it seemed that he had taken ample advantage of his impregnable position between the fronts, that he had requisitioned as many of the supplies in transit as he needed for his own ever-growing forces. A million men were willing to lay down their lives for Percy Tong. But mystery shrouded the great lord's whereabouts. No white man had ever seen him.

"Yes, I have heard his name," Robert admitted. Omura was watching him intently. It occurred to Dumont that he would have given his visitor the gate twenty minutes ago if it had not been for his stocking feet. It was silly. A man in shoes clearly had the advantage over a man without his shoes.

"Percy Tong has been trying to make trouble for us," said Omura in a more casual voice. "One or two foreigners have been hooked in. Their position is hopeless, of course. Glad to know that you're not among them."

"Why should I be? I am a doctor. Politics is not my cup of tea."

"No," said Omura, "politics is not your cup of tea. But Percy Tong's men took a couple of pot shots at somebody the other day, in front of the Shanghai Club. Probably thought you had come to straighten out the policies of Dumont Frères—giving Percy even less of a chance than he has now. Ha-ha-ha! Just out of defeated France, my friend, you were highly suspect. Well, they missed, and there haven't been any further attempts. So we thought . . ."

"So you thought that Percy Tong and I were on friendly terms? A brilliant in-

spiration, Commander. And now, if you don't mind, get out of here."

Omura got up and turned to go. "Delighted to have met you," he said.

"The pleasure is mine," said Robert.

THE office of Dumont Frères was a two story building not far from the French Consulate, overlooking the busy Quai de France, or French Bund. The present building had been put up in the 1890's, and its structure followed the lines of the early Shanghai hongs: square, spacious and cool, with four large rooms on the ground floor, and four large rooms upstairs. Open verandas around both floors. The marble front, of course, had been added later.

The bearded Sikh guard stepped aside and saluted as Dumont hopped out of his rickshaw. For a brief moment, he stopped to read the burnished brass plate to the left of the great door which held his name in large capital letters. *Dumont Frères,* it said, *Provision Importers, Furnishers, Ship Chandlers, Underwriters, Drapers, Milliners, Tea and Silk Merchants.* And jacks of all trades, Robert thought. He could not help smiling. He remembered the days when his little hands had left their marks on this brass plate, and his patient *amah* had wiped it clean, with never so much as a reproach.

Kurtz was waiting in his office on the upper floor, which had been Robert's father's office, and Robert's grandfather's office before that time. Sitting behind the huge mahogany desk at which two generations of Dumonts had done the best part of their work, the mummy extended his bony hand to the third generation who closed the door behind him.

"So Mohammed has come to the mountain," he said.

Robert laughed. "I meant to come before this only . . ."

"Only what? Sit down and don't apologize. You are here and I am glad you came." As if by mutual gentlemen's agreement, both men were on their best behavior. Company manners would make it easier.

"Robert Dumont," Kurtz began, "I was rude to you when I saw you first and I am sorry. Perhaps a man as old as I am, who has suffered as much and who has gone through as many vicissitudes, may ask indulgence when he gets cross once in a while."

Dumont concealed his impatience behind a front of facetiousness. "And now what does the mountain have in store for Mohammed?"

"Opportunity." Kurtz did not smile. "The same opportunity that started the first Dumont on his successful business career might make a businessman out of his learned grandson. If they tell you that this town is dead, that it is doomed beyond the hope of resurrection, do not believe them, Robert. If you recognize the realities, if you cooperate with the inevitable, yours will be a golden harvest. I want you to join the house of Dumont Frères. I want you to work with me."

"I have studied to be a surgeon," he said. "It is the only thing I know. I am a good surgeon. Why do you want me to join the firm?"

The mummy's face betrayed no emotion. "For one thing, you own this firm, Robert Dumont. Let us not lose sight of that important fact. It was your grandfather's will that Dumont Frères should never be a joint-stock company, that it should be kept in the family—safe and whole and unscattered. It was his will, too, that stipulated such modest allowances for the private purse of any Dumont who'd prefer a different career. Business before pleasure—the interest of the hong above the interest of Dumont! Your remittances were small, young man—ridiculously small for a Dumont. Just large enough, I surmise, to see you through the Sorbonne. But the Dumont funds are here, and as I ploughed under the profits, they multiplied. They are here for you to take over. You are the only living Dumont. I know of no others." Kurtz chuckled. "You have dictatorial powers and I am your humble servant."

"That still doesn't make me a businessman. Commercial acumen is something one must learn, not something one inherits."

"You will learn it." Eagerness came

into Kurtz' clipped voice. "You will learn it from me. The Lord denied me the blessing of a family, Robert. Throughout the years of this long life I have been alone. Man's greatest pride and satisfaction, to see his breed continued by a son, I've never known. I have worked for Dumont Frères, and I have tended their interest well. I am asking you to pay me back, Robert Dumont, for a long life given to your kind. I am asking you to be my son."

Robert looked at him in silence. It was strange that he should, at this moment, once more remember Omura's ominous words, "You will save yourself, and us, a good deal of unnecessary trouble by being busy at your office on the French Bund."

"How will this—relationship work out in practice?" Dumont asked.

KURTZ wheeled his chair around the desk. He was on Robert's side now, and a printed sheet of paper was in his bony hand.

Robert glanced at it. "Import statistics?"

Whatever emotion there had been in Kurtz' voice must have evaporated. "They show the supplies that China received during the last month," he said blandly. "Look at them carefully."

"It's more than I thought." Robert examined some of the items—gasoline, airplane parts, machinery—and the corresponding values in mex dollars. "How do they get it through?"

"You will not be an apprentice long, my son. You have found the salient point. Now look at the figures on this sheet."

It was a mimeographed report of shipments through various ports and inland routes, giving statistics for the same month. The items were exceedingly small and Robert could see, with one glance, that they would not add up to the impressive sum total of the first sheet. "Something is wrong," he said.

Kurtz chuckled. "Plenty is wrong. You see the figures for the much advertised Burma Road? A few thousand tons. A mere trickle. And yet, the information on both sheets is correct."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that considerable quantities of supplies are smuggled into China every month through her blockaded ports, right under the noses and the bayonets of the enemy!"

A name leaped into Robert's mind: Percy Tong. The master of the hidden passes and canals, the supreme boss of a vast organization that helped his tortured country keep up the fight in the rugged interior.

"Some foreign firms must be in on this," he said. "There must be some foreign firms playing ball with Percy Tong."

Kurtz sat quite still.

"I see," he said, "that you have not wasted this week. You are very savvy, my son. You are a Dumont. And your divination happens to be excellent. Truth to tell, Percy Tong has contacted a number of foreign firms. Dumont Frères is among them."

"And you—play ball?"

Kurtz smiled confidently. "To all appearances, yes. That is to say, we take the great man's orders and endorse his checks which he pays us in advance. It is the customary setup." He chuckled. "C.O.D. won't do, of course, when you are running a blockade. There is a risk involved in this kind of business. And what happens to the merchandise once it is in sight and in reach of the enemy—well, that is not our concern."

ROBERT was tense with anticipation. The blank in his mind had narrowed down. A single hazy spot remained.

He asked: "And what *does* happen to the merchandise once it is in sight and in reach of the enemy?"

"It is very simple. The Japanese have shown us every consideration. They are not searching our ships when they come in."

Robert nodded, his eyes fixed on the mummy's face.

"Naturally, such consideration deserves its reward. The policy of Dumont Frères has been one of realism and cooperation. After merchandise is

loaded on junks and canal launches, our friends would have to possess the all-seeing eye to catch them all. So we . . ."

"So you tip them off."

"For a fair-sized remuneration, needless to say. They snatch the shipments in time"—Kurtz was frankly triumphant now—"letting through an occasional barge to allay Percy Tong's suspicions and to make the bargain still worth his while. In fact the great man believes that we are on his side and keeps pressing for larger shipments. He does not consider us collaborationists! A very satisfactory arrangement."

"Satisfactory indeed," Robert agreed. "Dumont Frères sells the same shipment to both parties at once and is paid by both. Congratulations on your ingenuity!"

Kurtz accepted his compliment with grace. "Here is the opportunity. It wants to be taken. The watch will not tick much longer, Robert. You, my son, will lift the burden from my shoulders. Shall we shake on this?"

Robert Dumont did not take the outstretched hand. He rose from his chair. Now he had heard it. Now the last gray spot had disappeared from the picture in his mind. The picture had been filled in with color—garish, loud and ugly. It was shocking, but it was complete. A stream of angry red surged through his brain. Then, suddenly, it cleared and left a square of shining metal—the brass plate on the front of this house. It showed, in large capital letters, a name. His name—smeared by sordid double-dealing.

"I did not know," said Robert, "that Dumont Frères was crooked."

Perhaps he had expected Kurtz to make light of his rage. The old man could have chuckled, could have answered with a sharp rebuke. He did neither. The sick dull color of his skin began to deepen, and darker shadows formed around his mouth.

"It is not a question of dollars and cents," he said, "not a question of profits. I know the East, and the East has taken my life, my hopes, my health. It has also taught me a lesson. The East is changing, my lad, and in the new order of things, the white man must align himself with the conqueror if he wants to survive."

"And the policy of Dumont Frères has been to align the firm with the conqueror?" Robert asked.

"We have tried to help them win the war. It is all I could do."

Robert had difficulty keeping his voice level. He wanted to lash this brain-sick old mummy with a tirade of invective, blast him from his chair, but he managed to get his words out with only a minimum of anger in their tone.

"You have made me an offer today, Mr. Kurtz," he said, "and I think I shall accept. But the way I want to run this business differs from the way you have run it. Dumont Frères is not large enough for both of us. As the sole owner of this firm, and the only living Dumont, I dismiss you."

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. TONG

BILL MacRAE was at his best whenever he had a chance to explain a piece of complicated Oriental business in simple Occidental language. He was, perhaps, the last of a breed of white men who had done their bit of stirring in the hot turmoil of the Far East without getting anything out of it but a good knocking about and profound personal satisfaction. He liked his excitement on the raw side, and proof of his success was in the fact that he was still alive.

"This war," he said, leaning across the table and talking to Patricia Matthews in a low voice, "has been tougher on the conqueror than on the conquered. The enemy is pretty well washed up, financially. His campaign may yet collapse for lack of funds. He needs cash and, in the money markets of the world, he cannot find a soul that will advance him a single cent. Now listen to this: the enemy is turning to the Shanghai money market in a desperate appeal for help."

"I understand all that," said Patricia, "only . . ."

"Only there is no Shanghai money market. Shanghai is broke, Pat, stony

broke. The war has stopped the flow of trade that used to come rolling down the Yangtze. It was the lifeblood of this blooming town. And all the oil and all the machinery that goes the other way, cannot make up for the losses. Shanghai is broke. Just the same, the enemy expects to raise a hundred million pounds in this city."

Patricia Matthews was the daughter of a banker, a Bund banker, and one of the biggest. She could not help being interested. "How is it done?" she asked.

"With mirrors. Like other human beings, Sir Harry Gundheim has two hands. With his right he extends a loan to the enemy. With his left he raises the same loan in London."

"It sounds clever," said Patricia, "but it is absurd. Why should London squander its precious funds to finance the enemy? It doesn't make sense."

"Hurray!" said the ruddy Scot, forgetting, for a moment, to keep his voice down. "You've got it! If the British Treasury knew what the funds will be used for it would be colder than an iceberg. But the British Treasury will never know the beneficiary of the transaction. They will be told that the money will filter through Shanghai into the hands of some Chinese factions which cannot be openly supported at the present time. London is so damned worried about Singapore that they'll do anything to keep the enemy busy farther north. And here's the beauty of it! Even the man who negotiates the business for Sir Harry in London will not know!"

"And who is that man?"

He chose his words carefully. "Obviously there are only a handful of people close enough to the War Cabinet and close enough to the Treasury to pry a hundred million pounds out of them at this time. Obviously there is only one man close enough to both and to Harry Gundheim to do the job."

"His name?"

MacRae looked at her for a second as though what he had to say now made him sorry. "There are certain things that only a woman can get away with," MacRae said slowly. "Especially in Shanghai. One of those things is sneaking into a millionaire's private office and going through his desk after hours. That's your job. Percy Tong's interest in this information is vital."

Here it was—the inexorable fact. Here was the reason for their tete-a-tete tonight. To be sure, Bill was as nice about it as he could have been under the circumstances. He had taken her to the Medallion, and they had had champagne and even a dance or two. They had sat at this little table, in the dim light and the thick air of the place, with taipans and marines and Russian girls all around them, and Bill had been behaving like a gentleman. He had taken two hours to give her that order. Now that he had spoken, the air was too heavy to breathe. She sat quietly, her whole body limp with fear and humiliation.

IT had been this way for some time now, and more than once Patricia had felt that she was at the point of collapsing under the burden of this thing. She could not get used to it, could not escape the fear that haunted her days and that made her nights alive with ugly shadows. It had been this way ever since a secret meeting of influential taipans had decided on "cheerful cooperation," on a policy of realism in the face of the inevitable. Ever since Percy Tong, as the self-styled avenger of four hundred million Chinese, had singled out three Shanghai businessmen for murder. Her father was among them. The two others had died. It had been MacRae's intervention alone that had saved John Matthews.

Patricia looked at William MacRae who was trying hard to read her thoughts. It had been his bright idea (and she knew he was proud of it) to replace the cold mandate of liquidation with this ingenious and exceedingly Oriental deal. Percy Tong could kidnap and kill, but he could not know the minds of Shanghai's taipans. He needed a scout, and even William MacRae himself, who appeared to enjoy Tong's confidence, and was generally considered his Shanghai "contact," had not enough of an in. Thus it came about that Patricia Matthews bought her father's life.

It was a heavy price to pay.

Really, it was like an old story where somebody had sold his soul to the devil. The signature was written in blood, and there was no loophole. John Matthews, who had steadfastly refused to finance the "smuggling" trade of Percy Tong and who was, therefore, classified as an enemy by the latter, was safe as long as his daughter agreed to serve as Tony's secret agent. Nothing would happen to him as long as she kept up her end of the deal. Patricia was wondering, idly and helplessly, just what would happen if her father knew.

"Will this never end?" she said out loud.

MacRae was plainly relieved that she had broken the silence. It made him feel uncomfortable to see her wander off on sullen reveries like this.

"Percy Tong will make an effort to keep this money from changing hands. You see what is involved? The loan must be prevented at all costs."

"Bill," said Pat. "I can't do it. I won't go through with it. I quit."

MacRae's expression was all sympathy, and Patricia believed that he meant it. "Pat," he said, "I know what you've been through and I know this is tough. I know that it isn't easy for you to go prowling up on the fifteenth floor of the Gundheim Building. More than that, it's dangerous. If that roaring giant should catch you, only Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy, could help you to get out alive."

"I am not afraid," said Pat. "But I won't do it."

"Let me finish. This will be your last assignment. It will be the end. After this, you will be free. John Wheeler Matthews will live, because you will have paid the price in full. I myself shall seek out the elusive Percy Tong and ask him for your release. He'll understand. A Chinaman appreciates the virtue of filial piety. Do you know that a Chinaman's sons and daughters will cut out pieces of their own flesh and cook it so that their father will gain new strength by eating it? Do you know . . . ?"

"That children retire early to satiate the mosquitoes before their parents go to bed?"

There was a wholly inexplicable flicker in Patricia's eyes, like the glow of an amusing reminiscence. But when MacRae stopped to wonder about it, it was gone. "How do you know," she said, "that Percy Tong will grant your request?"

"I have never met Mr. Tong," said MacRae. "No white man has ever seen him. I've only dealt with his lieutenants. But I shall meet him and I know what I'll say. Pat, I give you my word as the only respectable scoundrel along three thousand miles of China Coast that he will listen."

He held out his big square hand to her and they shook on that.

"I hope you get through to him," said Patricia, "with a whole skin."

MacRae grinned and removed a platinum stud from his starched shirtfront. When he parted the shirt an inch, Pat could see he was wearing a bulletproof vest underneath.

CHAPTER IV

LAST WARNING

ROBERT DUMONT was tossing nervously on his cot. He had turned in early because of the big day ahead, and he could not sleep. The *City of Utrecht* was due with a hot cargo at sunrise on the French Bund. She was out of San Francisco with a load of airplane engines, mortars and sound detectors—the first shipment of its kind to be delivered to Dumont Frères since Robert had taken over. He was not going to take any chances with it. The merchandise had been paid for in advance by his Chinese customers—he would see to it that they received it, safe and sound. No one was going to do any snatching. . .

Or was it, perhaps, the hardness of his cot that kept him awake? It was a simple camp bed that Liu, the boy, had acquired in a store of North Szechuan Road which dealt in army equipment. Liu had put up for him the large front room that had been vacant under Kurtz' regime. Really, the Dumont hong was as good a place to live as any. As in the

hongs of old, the upper story had been built to include the taipan's living quarters, and Robert's father had lived there with his young wife before they had built the house on Bubbling Well Road. Now a Dumont was starting in again, and business required his presence at the office day and night—just as a doctor had to stay with his patient until the crisis was over and the fever curve went down.

Kurtz might have been corrupt, but his abilities as a taipan had been up to the highest standards. He had been equally efficient at the larger issues of the firm's policy and at detail. The margins of letters and contracts were fairly covered with figures written in his almost feminine hand, with the extraordinarily fine point of his fountain pen. He had left everything in perfect shape, and Robert had little difficulty picking up the threads. With the assistance of the clerical staff whose members had the civil-service attitude of loyalty to whoever sat in the taipan's office, he had succeeded in obtaining a comprehensive picture of the firm's assets and obligations. While it was true, as he had told Kurtz, that this was something one must learn, not something one inherits, there was still a difference between the outsider and the son. Many of those accounts bore names that he remembered from his childhood days, and working on them was like thumbing through the yellowed pages of a family album—the features were vaguely familiar, even if the relationship had lapsed into oblivion.

Robert turned on the light—one o'clock. Three hours to go. He ought to sleep some. His first skirmish would take place at sunrise. What if he should lose? Should he discontinue shipments through Shanghai altogether, as his compradore advised? Should he reroute them via the caravan road? None of the Settlement's major firms had done so. It would have been an acknowledgment of the death of Shanghai. Would they call him a fool? Or a pioneer? Most probably, they would laugh. Robert pulled the blanket over his shoulder. He did not care.

It was a quarter to four when Liu, the boy, stood at the end of Robert's cot with a small tray in his hands. Just how he did it was his personal secret. Robert always awoke without remembering that Liu had touched him or made a sound. He drank the steaming green tea from the handleless cup and the heaviness of these two or three hours of sleep fell away from him. This was an important day.

Important and dangerous. He was going to go out himself this morning to meet the *City of Utrecht* in the Yangtze mouth, some fifteen miles outside the Settlement limits, so he could be on the bridge when she rode up the Whangpoo on the incoming tide.

Robert dressed and slipped a revolver into his pocket. Out there he would be on his own.

THE company's motor launch was moored at the small pier in front of the hong. It was a stout little vessel with a rather broad beam for its modest length, a wheelhouse fore and a small, uncomfortable deck aft. The house flag of Dumont Frères was fluttering from the stern, under the tattered blue-white-and-red of the French tricolor that afforded a precarious protection outside the safety zone of the treaty-port. The pilot—a young fellow with a woodcarved face who would have made a fine ensign in the Chinese navy if China had had a navy—had been careful to warm her up, and the motor purred steadily when Robert stepped aboard.

"Master look out. B'long too muchee danger Woosung side," said Liu, the boy, who had accompanied Robert across the Bund to the mooring.

It was still completely dark. The night was quiet and the bark of a dog far over in Pootung was the only sound. A sampan or two ferried early commuters over to the Settlement. Robert could see their dim lights. A heavy junk was going out and its square sail moved past silently, darker yet than the darkness of the sky. The Chinese pilot opened the throttle wide and with a healthy roar the launch went out into the black lazy current of the river. Robert and the pilot were the only ones aboard, two

lonely spots of life in a universe of lightless silence.

A penetrating fog had drifted in from the ocean, coating the rails and planks of the deck with sticky moisture. Robert went below to the cabin, a bare oblong with a table in the center. A bench ran around it along the three walls. At the narrow end of the table opposite the door, there sat a girl. She wore a buttoned-up raincoat with a hood pushed back off her head. A tinge of amber was in her brown hair and her eyes were an iridescent gray.

"Good-morning," said Patricia Matthews.

"Good-morning," said Robert Dumont. He was a Frenchman, and polite, but having observed the amenity he was free to let his jaw drop. "*Mon Dieu!*" he said. "How in the world . . ."

Patricia laughed. "You don't have to look so shocked. I am real. And I'd give my shirt for a cup of coffee right now."

"Sorry," he said, "about the coffee. I'm afraid we'll have to wait till the skipper of the *Utrecht* offers us some of his. That is, if you intend to go aboard with me."

Patricia looked at him with a queer smile. "So you think you are going to meet the *City of Utrecht?*"

"Of course I am!" There was a hint of impatience in his voice. Was there going to be more unwelcome mystery? "Why shouldn't I?" he said.

The girl had risen from the bench and pulled her hood back over her head. "Could we go topside?" she said. "It's stuffy in here."

Robert took her arm and helped her up the slippery steps. The fog had thickened. Short, choppy waves slapped against the sides of the launch and the little craft was rolling. But the motor was put-putting confidently and she was making good speed. Standing at the wheel near the bow, the pilot was holding the course.

Dumont and Patricia grasped the wet rail that ran around the small square of open deck space at the stern.

"I don't like your mysterious warnings. What's up?" he demanded. "Why did you come?"

"You're as impetuous as one of my Mongolian ponies. I wanted to see that you didn't catch your feet on a hurdle."

"And you had to get up in the middle of the night and sneak aboard this launch and get soaked in this fog to . . ."

"To protect you."

Robert couldn't help laughing at this. "Look here," he said, "the *City of Utrecht* is anchored in the Yangtze mouth somewhere off Woosung waiting to catch the tide into the Settlement. She is a Dutch freighter and we happen to be the line's Shanghai agents. I radioed the skipper last night. He knows I am coming. Will you be good enough to tell me what you've come to protect me from?"

IN ITS struggle against the stubborn darkness, the day had scored its first decisive victory. The shadows fell back and sulkily retreated toward the city. Ahead, over the Woosung forts, there was a brighter gleam. A brisk wind was blowing from the ocean, driving the fog before it in large white scuds.

A sudden dip of the craft threw her against Dumont and with the swiftness of a professional prestidigitator, Pat dipped her left hand in his right overcoat pocket and brought it back with his gun. Robert saw it in her hand and recoiled.

"You're such a complete damn fool," she said.

For a brief instant Robert saw the revolver, a black spot in the whiteness of the misty air. Then he heard it splash in the choppy waves of the Whangpoo.

"Is that, by any chance, your idea of protecting me?" he said with open anger in his voice.

"Perhaps it is," said Patricia.

She pointed forward, into the light. They had passed the sharp corner where the village of Woosung had stood before the shells of naval guns had reduced it to a shambles, and entered the mighty Yangtze-kiang. The crisp knocking of the Whangpoo waves changed to the slowly rising swells of the yellow flood which took its time flowing down toward the sea, tired from the tortuous journey through three thousand miles of Asiatic

earth. The fog had lifted, its white scuds were scattered above this majestic body of water that seemed to be as grand and as boundless as the ocean itself. Forward, where Patricia was pointing, a dark blob loomed in the thinning haze.

"Ahoy!" yelled their pilot.

She was a sturdy vessel, the black of her hull stained and weatherbeaten, and her superstructure of a smudgy yellow. Her anchor chain was down. Now, as they came up under her starboard side, a sudden gust tore away the last veil of mist and they could see her clearly. *City of Utrecht* was painted in large white letters over her side.

"Here we are," said Robert, "safe enough. Or am I still in need of protection?"

"Ahoy!" yelled the pilot again.

Their engine was idling now and they were hard under the steeply rising flank of the Dutchman, slowly lifting and falling with the swells. A wisp of smoke was curling from the ship's funnel. It was the only sign of life on her. As no one answered his call, the pilot opened the throttle once more and gingerly went round her bow, avoiding the heavy anchor chain.

On the port side things looked more inviting. The accommodation ladder was down and on the small platform jutting out over the surface of the water, there stood two men in uniform. They were not Hollanders.

One of the men tossed them a line.

Robert saw that they had rifles and that they wore the navy blue uniform of the enemy. Their slanting eyes looked grim over the black antiseptic masks that hid their noses and cheeks. Were these fighting men so afraid of germs that they had to protect their respiratory organs even here, in the washed air of the sea? One of the sailors jumped aboard the launch.

"You stay in place," he said. Before Robert had time to protest, the sailor had grabbed the lapels of his overcoat with one iron fist. With his other hand he slapped his pockets. Robert struggled to break his grip and his arm was raised for a blow at the man's jaw. But he saw the importunate warning in Pat's eyes and his fist stopped in mid-air.

"Take your hands off me, you yellow scum!"

But the sailor had done with his job and the result of the frisking was negative. "You stay in place," he said, and jumped back to the small platform.

"The hell I will!" Dumont shouted. 'I've come to see the captain of this ship. Let me aboard!"

Patricia touched Robert's elbow. "Hold on," she said. Robert paid no heed. He set one foot on the gunwale and was poised to step across. At precisely this moment the sailor who had not moved untied the knot on his end of the line and the rope slid into the water.

Their Chinese pilot had looked on with the admirable stolidity of his race. "Go home, sir?" he called to Robert.

THE click of a pair of boots came from the upper part of the accommodation ladder. They came down, slowly and deliberately. A third figure appeared on the platform.

"Morning, Doctor," said Lieutenant-Commander Omura. "Hope the boys weren't too rough with you. Good thing you were unarmed. People have been shot for carrying a pocketknife in this neighborhood. Hello, Miss . . ."

"Matthews," said Robert. "Miss Matthews and I have come to board this ship and to go back up to Shanghai with her captain. My company is the Dutch line's agent. I don't understand your attitude." Robert's voice was vibrant with anger. The little launch, adrift without power, was bobbing crazily around the platform, no more than a couple of yards off the three men's boots. There was something devilishly humiliating in the situation.

"I hate to disappoint you, Doctor," said Omura. "The captain is aboard the ship but you won't be able to see him. We took over shortly after midnight."

"On what grounds?"

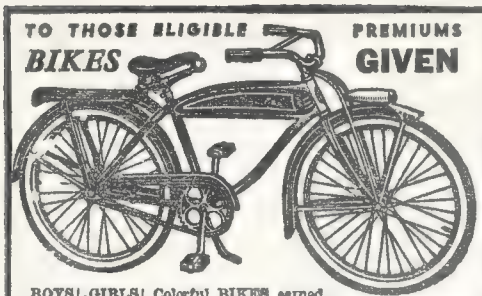
"Perhaps you can guess. Contraband. The *City of Utrecht* is a prize of war. I've put a prize crew aboard her and we are taking her into Nagasaki." He grinned. "If you don't mind."

(To be concluded)

TO THOSE ELIGIBLE

PREMIUMS GIVEN

BIKES



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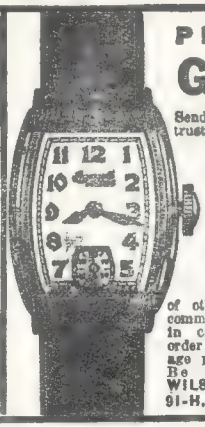

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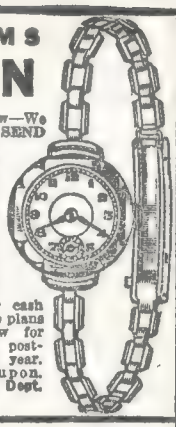

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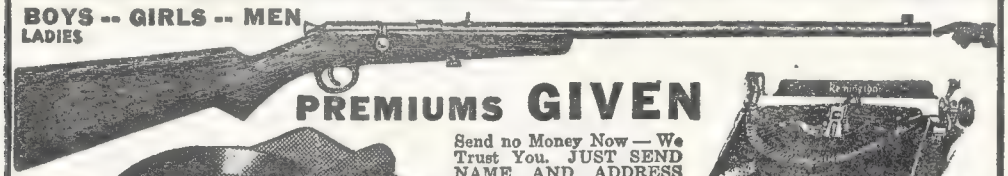

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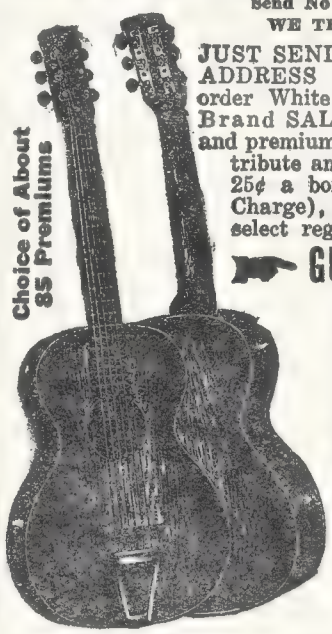

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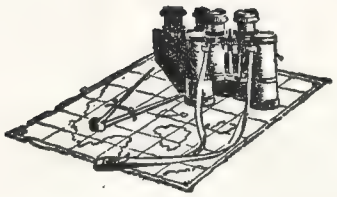

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

THE unwashed Todds.

Request:—I have recently read "The People of the Blue Mountains" by H. P. Blavatsky in which she writes of certain tribes—the Todds, Kouroumbs and Baddagnes. The region is in India near the coast of Malabar. The "Blue Mountains" are the Kouimbatour range.

It is a fantastic story but, I believe, a true one, as Madam Blavatsky was not given to writing entirely fictitious things. That country, little known at the time of her writing, *(the latter half of the 19th century—Ed.)* must now be familiar to the British officials in that region. The people of the tribes mentioned interest me intensely—especially the *Todds.* I shall appreciate any information about them.

—Helen P. Patten

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh:—You put a mere "expert" on the spot, pitting him against an inspired mystic.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Blavatsky was an inspired woman who had the faculty of tapping some mysterious source of Oriental "mana." We must realize at the same time that she wrote mystically and, let us not lose sight of the fact, *symbolically.* You are probably aware that Theosophists maintain that only advanced students can understand the real meaning of much of "The Secret Doctrine." "Isis Unveiled," too, seems to mean a lot that the unenlightened reader never can grasp.

I have not read "The People of the Blue Mountains." I do not know, therefore, just what qualities Madame Blavatsky discovered in these mysterious tribes that you mention. I say, mysterious, because there exist no hill tribes in Madras having names exactly as you spell them.

We need not, however, quibble about spelling. There do exist in the Nilgerri hills "Todas" and Baddagas," which are probably what the author refers to. Kouroumbs I have never heard of, nor can I find any similar sounding noise in any book of reference.

Aside, then, from mysticism, the Todas and Badaggas of today are not a very inspiring group of people. The two are closely allied in manners and language and, ethnologically, present the interesting phenomenon of being the relics, unfortunately quite decadent, of an earlier and superior race dotted like islands in a sea of primitive Dravidian stock.

Both tribes retain the physical characteristics of superior stature, lighter brown skin, straight noses, finely chiseled lips; these amongst the surrounding Dravidian races who are shorter, frailer, much darker, with flattened features.

It is quite possible that Madame Blavatsky found some mystic insight into their unknown past—or, who knows, was privileged to study some of their secret rituals of witchcraft and devil raising.

Aside from their physical characteristics these two hill tribes have retrogressed today to a condition distinctly more primitive than their surrounding Dravidians. They are physically dirty and unwashed; they eat incredible filths; they practice polyandry, usually adelphogamy, though the woman is by no means restricted to choosing her men out of the same family. Their lives are wrapped around with a maze of tabus and rituals enforced by a decadent priesthood, who, it is suspected, practice female infanticide—though the British authorities have been able to establish only three such authentic cases.

The Baddagas, specifically, differ from the Todas in that they speak a dialect of their own, a corrupt Kanarese. Their form of religion is more primitive, (not nearly so complicated), their gods being represented by ancient carved stone cromlechs hidden in hill groves. They pay a yearly tribute of pastoral and farm produce to the Todas, influenced by a fear of Toda sorcery. It is suspected, too, that they pay, as a part of the tribute, a number of virgin girls. The latter point is difficult to prove, since the explanation is that the girls are married by the Toda priests.

If you might be interested in a more serious study of your "Todds" and "Baddagnes" that might show you some inner meaning in the Blavatsky book, you might try to borrow from the N. Y. public library "Castes and Tribes of Southern India" by E. Thurston, who treats of them exhaustively, though, as a Britisher, not very sympathetically.

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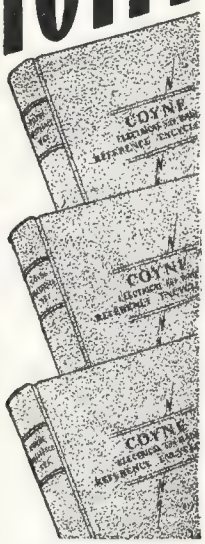

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(Continued from page 101)

lords hereabout think your grace to be getting too strong and league against you—blame not me. Then again, your grace is of a full habit—like to take a stroke or be bothered with boils all over his body; almost anything can happen—"

Pietro started up with an oath.

"What's this?" he rasped, crossing himself.

"I crave your grace's pardon—do I speak indistinctly? I was but saying that pestilence—"

"Say no more!" snaps Pietro, and his eyes shuttled from Ercole to Cesare. Both the young men were smiling now, but his grace was all a-scowl.

"I'll—I'll have naught to do with your pauper county," says he.

"And you?" says Ercole to Cesare.

Cesare rose.

"My aim was but to avenge my father," says he. "But— land may not be left ungoverned, and the people on the land still less. If you're not to stay here, Ercole—"

"I was not trained in governance," says my lord. " 'Tis an art, I find: I have it not."

"Then—Castello Nero shall march with Naldi, if thee like," says Cesare. "I'll—do my best."

He clasped hands with Ercole.

"Fearing no curse?" grates old Pietro from the doorway.

"Why, whom have I wronged?" says Cesare.

And oons, sire—there it is; the point, I mean; there he had it, in his simplicity; he had wronged no one and so he feared no curse. I doubt not that he hath had

(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)

his troubles in the county since then; but when last I heard, he was old and fat and jolly, with nary a devil looking over his shoulder.

Similiter—consider the innocence of Your Grace! Hath Your Highness wronged any one?

Evidently not; having (as any judge or Bishop shall certify) the right to burn the hut of any subject—aye, and hang the occupant also—for good reason.

And if taxes are not good reason, what is?

Sequitur, that yon old woman's cursing was just so much tearing of the air; but why hang her? Curses unmerited fall back upon the curser; now watch if hunger do not bring her those very colicks she wished on Your Grace's son; whether the cold (winter's not far off) do not turn *her* black, rather than Your Lordship's lady; nay, we shall see—we shall see who'll die in that ditch she screamed of; Your Eminence's descendants or herself.

In a word, I think this dark world is as full of curses as a dark evening is of bats; but only guilt gives them a branch to perch on.

And between this old woman in her hut—or rather, out of it, ha-ha!—and Your Excellency in his palace; who hath the guilt?

Can there be any doubt?
Certainly there is none in
The ever-loyal mind
Of
Your lordship's humble pensioner,
L. Caradosso,
Captain.

*

Endorsement

~~Hang~~
Build her a new cottage
Pietro
Dux.

(Continued from page 10)

This February '43 *Adventure* is the result of our casting.

We knew we couldn't possibly hope to make everyone happy; that inevitably there are going to be letters asking why so-and-so in the ranks of our Writers' Brigade didn't get included. But there are good reasons—this War we all happen to be fighting in whatever way we can, first among them—why the roster isn't more complete and representative. You'd be amazed at how many names—familiar to *Adventure* addicts down through the years—are now on the rolls of the armed services on active duty with no time to write, or engaged in some other war work that means full-time duty. Or maybe you won't be amazed. After all, *Adventure* writers aren't exactly the group you'd expect to find lazing around when there's a war to be won! Next month here we want to tell you what some of these men are doing—we've saved space for just that purpose—and we know you'll be interested and proud to hear details.

Now getting back to the men who *are* on the contents page this month. With the exception of the two introduced at the beginning of this department, one and all are men who have stood here around the *Camp-Fire* time and again in past years and contributed much toward enriching the traditions that make *Adventure* what it is today. Readers who know them of old will be glad to welcome them once again. New readers, we hope, will be equally glad to make their acquaintance.—K.S.W.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

Brian O'Brien, who knows large hunks of the West African Coast as well as most of the rest of us know our own backyards, takes us to the Cameroons jungle next month, on the north bank of the Campo River across the border from Spanish Rio Muni, to meet the sulphur-tongued Charley Leeds—

"PALM-OIL PATRIOT"

—and Hope, the American missionary from Kribi, who knew when to sing a psalm and when to keep mum. Ivory poacher and oil thief—sky pilot and jungle vicar, the two men were worlds apart in everything but their solitude, for they were the only whites in all the district. Then came the night the drums began to talk—and priest and poacher learned that the gap between them could be bridged after all in the face of a common enemy.

"A Taste for Cod" by B. B. Fowler lets us fly with the North Atlantic Patrol that guards the Iceland-bound convoys sailing the sub-infested waters off Newfoundland. . . . "The Way of a Cossack" by Joe Abrams takes us to the Russian front to fight beside Igor the Bug, five feet of concentrated fury, in whose veins flowed the same blood that stemmed the tide of invasion on another winter battle line four generations ago. . . . "Drop a Wrench on a Grunt's Head" by Bill Gulick is a laugh-crammed high-line yarn about a couple of guys who decided that maybe Australia was the safest place after all to rest up from the horrors of war on the home front. (We didn't know what a "grunt" was either, till we learned between chuckles.) . . . "The Dutchman, the Dias and the Jap" by James Francis Dwyer is an off-the-trail story of Borneo and the beasts that roam its steaming jungles. . . . "Patrols Are Everywhere" by R. W. Daly takes us to the Balkan mountain fastnesses where Mihailovitch's guerrilla Chetniks still fight on. . . .

. . . . then there's the concluding installment of Ernest O. Hauser's gripping two-part tale of the China Coast, "Shanghai Post-Mortem" and "Badlands Emperor" by Bruce Nelson, a fact story about the fabulous Marquis de Mores, the French noble who turned American cattle king and challenged T. R. to a duel. Plus the usual interesting departments and features you can't find anywhere but in—

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Any information as to the whereabouts of Elmer McMann, last heard of in Mt. Pleasant, Texas 16 years ago, will be appreciated by his son, Charles McMann, Box B, Florence, Ariz.

Would like to find my brothers Leslie and Allan Towns, last heard from in Winnipeg, Can. many years ago. Leslie is a World War veteran. If anyone knows their whereabouts, or their children, please inform W. J. Towns, Box 2460, Globe, Ariz.

Herbert A. Roig, known to be in California about 1929 and to be living in Houston, Tex. about 1939. Age 41, height 5-10, weight 150, gray eyes, light brown hair. Information about him will be appreciated by his friend Frank Landon, 1146 Webster St., San Francisco, Cal.

Wanted: information about W. D. (Will) Burnett, last heard from in Phoenix, Ariz. He is about six feet, weight 185 lbs. Tattoo on chest and one arm. Was in army 1919-20. Please write his friend C. B. Morgan, R. R. #2, Durant, Okla.

Don A. Ellis and I were buddies up till the time he enlisted in Coast Artillery about June 1939. Last heard from him in Aug. '41 when he was attending Bakers and Cooks School, Ft Slocum, N. Y. a member of 5th C. A. If he, or anyone knowing his whereabouts, reads this, please write Pfc. Roy P. Whitton, c/o *Adventure*.

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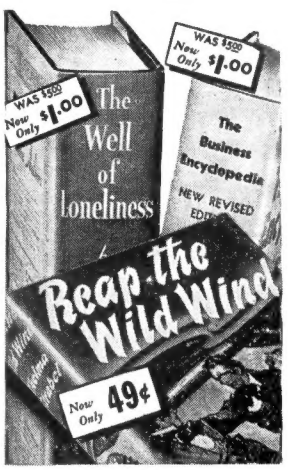

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